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VALENTINO

VALENTINO

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY IN ITALY

BY

WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
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VALENTINO.

CHAPTER I.

CASTLE AND VATICAN.

In Rome, on a crisp December morning in the year 1501, Monsignor Roccamura, Governor-General and Prelate of the Castle of St. Angelo, stood at the rampart of that fortress gazing upon the eddying Tiber at his feet, upon the houses opposite, and upon the Alban hills stretching away southward in varying tints of verdure. He had stepped from the balcony of a colonnaded building which served as residence for himself and his military lieutenants. In the centre of the court rose the massive tower of Hadrian's tomb, which served the double use of arsenal and dungeon. Along the castle terrace loitered a couple of cross-bowmen; at the gate a dozen halberdiers sat upon rude benches throwing dice, while one of their number stood sentry; over all rested the grace and glory of the Italian sun, cordial and beneficent even on a winter's day.

Within the enclosure an armorer worked in leisurely fashion at a corselet, a few soldiers were wiping off their harness, two bent over a grindstone, but all of them ever and anon cast a look towards the cook's stalls, where hung a score of slaughtered sheep and pigs, while a dozen menials busied themselves in preparations: for to-night was a feast in honor of the nuptial cortège from Ferrara which should presently pass the gates of Rome and betake itself to the Vatican to lay its homage before Lucretia Borgia, on behalf of her new husband, and the garrison was to be regaled with meat stew, and puddings scalded with olive oil, and tuns of the wine of Velletri. The commander surveyed the scene—the passers on the bridge, the neat walk along the rampart flanked with heaps of cannon balls and iron bolts for the cross-bowmen, the groups within the walls. Then turning towards the doorway, he called:

"Capitano Vela."

A burly officer, some years the commendatore's senior, appeared. "Capitano," said his superior, "at noon I go to the Ponte Molle, where Don Michele will align the troops. The necessary orders have been given, you will see them repeated. Of course I leave you in command: mind well the tower, where," he added with a smile, "I go to salute our amiable guest."

"It shall be so done, monsignore," replied the

other with deference—then as his chief turned he muttered, "Left in command! the others go to galas and I stay in this dungeon; the others get promotion, while I am all my life captain of pikemen. It would be like them to bid me watch on the rampart to-night while they eat and drink themselves besotted."

Meanwhile, the commendatore had reached the door of the tower, upon which he knocked; a sentry peeped out through an iron grating and immediately opened. Within was a guard-room furnished with a table, some beds of hide, laid on rough trestles, a few stools, and against the wall, racks containing halberds and swords and a line of arquebuses. The commander ascended a stairway, over the top of which fell an iron grating; this was unbolted and raised by another sentry outside a chamber within which had been confined for two weeks Count Isidore Savelli, prisoner of Cesare Borgia, abducted from Rocca Savello for reasons unknown to his captors and jailers alike. Drawing back the bolt, he stepped in and bowed courteously to the captive, who rose from his seat without otherwise replying to the salutation.

"What is it this morning, commendatore," he exclaimed, "a release, or a death warrant, or an inquiry whether I am going to turn butterfly and make my way out through the bars of this window?"

"Neither, that I know of," suavely replied the

other, "but it is two days since I had the honor of inquiring after your health, and to-day being a feast with us, I thought to bring a pleasure by informing you that a pasty made by my own cook and served with flasks of white wine and red will be on your table after Ave Maria. And if some further relish be wanted——"

"Prithee," broke in the prisoner, "enough said of dainties to a man who wants no more than a crust. But if you would do me a kindness, and one that should bring you the blessing of my patron saint, let one of your scullions give this filthy abode a cleaning. Look at the cobwebs and the dust; it has not been swept in a twelvemonth. Yesterday, while having my fifteen minutes on the terrace, I noticed a lusty fellow polishing a lot of horse accoutrements, and methinks if he could be spared me for an hour with a bucket of water, all your pasties and pots o' wine might go to my fat friend Capitano Vela, who loves them so much and who keeps me company at meal-time."

In saying these last words the count smiled with a wry grimace. He alluded to his refusal the day after his capture to eat or drink of anything of which one of the officers of the castle had not previously partaken. And while the commendatore had been talking of the pasty so carefully prepared, the count was reflecting that so particular a dish was one to beware of. The temptation might

be great to make the wedding feast one of funereal import for him.

The commendatore glanced round the dim walls and said, "In truth you are the first that ever condescended to observe the condition of this humble apartment, but," he added after a queer hesitation, "it is not all who remain so long as you have done."

"Stabbed in the back while eating, or smothered as they slept, eh? May my departure be otherwise."

The commendante gave a shrug of the shoulders. "Let us have no more sombre words," he said. "The varlet you spoke of shall be at your service shortly, and I wish you good appetite in spite of the drawbacks." And so saying the commendatore made an inclination, left the room, barred the door as before, and returned to the rampart terrace.

An hour later an unkempt, ill-clad man made his way up the tower stair bearing cleaning utensils and water, and grumbling as he went all manner of plagues upon the head of so troublesome a prisoner.

"Ho, master sentry!" he cried, on arriving at the trap-door, "lift up the gate; here is a dainty soul within must have his kennel cleaned, and the commander could do me no better turn this holiday than to— What, Como, is it thou!" he ex-

claimed, as the guard's face became distinguishable, "was there ever such a fool's errand as this, to make a tidy nest for a man who is presently to be laid under the sod?"

"Perhaps for that very reason he wants to have a clean face while he may," replied the other. "The commander ordered me to admit you, and no doubt he thoughtfully bade thee bring me that flask that sways at thy girdle; we are friends of only a day or two, but I am willing to drink to thy health all the same." And so saying the soldier detached the fiaschetto from its place and stuffed it into his own side-pocket.

"Forsooth, Como, thou hast the freest ways of any man in the garrison. I brought it to wash out my own mouth presently, and now——"

"And now," interrupted the soldier with a grin, "make haste and perhaps there will be a sup for thee at the bottom." And so saying the sentry unbarred the prison, and pushed the other in, closing and rebolting the door.

At sight of the untidy water-bearer the prisoner rose to his feet in silence, while his lips grew white with emotion, and as the bars grated back into their place, he stepped abruptly forward, threw his arms about the neck of the supposed attendant, and said in a tremulous voice:

"Oliverotto, my deliverer, at length the end is near."

"Hush," ejaculated the other, "not so loud; and let us drown our words while we talk;" and so saying he whom the prisoner called Oliverotto plunged his broom into the bucket and sent a splash against the wall nearest the sentry. Then he turned and whispered, "Are the bars cut?"

"Yes," replied Savelli, "the saw held out almost to the end; a good tug would bring two of them away."

"Then it must be for to-night," rejoined Oliverotto, making a great scraping across the ceiling until he stood beside the prisoner's bed, which, as in the case of those used for the garrison, consisted of a leather pallet, and deftly slipped under it a twist of small knotted cord which had been concealed beneath his jerkin.

"From this window to the rampart," he pursued hurriedly, "are thirty feet, and the rope is beyond that length. From the rampart to the ditch twenty-five more. Here is a knife. Use the last bit of the rope, cut your tunic into strips, and, as for the other half way—why, the mud is soft at the bottom. The brick-work of the ditch to the westward has crumbled; you can climb it and thence edge yourself to the elm trees, where you will be out of sight of the sentries—and the sentries will be heavy-eyed to-night. Then run to the left till you strike a cross-road, and a couple of Colonna's men will be somewhere thereabout with

horses. Leave this tower when the bells strike midnight; two hours later you can be in the saddle, and sunrise will find you at Rocca Savello." And the speaker plunged his brush anew into the water and used it upon the incrusted dirt of years.

"Gallant fellow," exclaimed Savelli, under his breath, "you save my life—how can I ever repay you?"

"Easily," answered the other, in the same guarded voice; "I have not done this for love of you, be sure of that. Your cousin Elvira left Ferrara four weeks ago. Why she came here I know not. Cesare had left the army, and there being nothing to detain me, I accorded myself a hasty leave and followed her. Never having been to Rome, I thought to pass unrecognized. By chance I learned of your arrest. With you dead there would be no one to maintain my suit. The only way to get near you—and a bold way of securing a hiding-place—was to beg a menial's employment in the castle. The man Pietro whom you had at Ferrara was here with the same purpose, and another he called Titolano. We agreed to stake our lives together for your rescue. I may have small chance with Elvira—we will speak of that hereafter—but I have a thought—a thought say I—my brain is ablaze, my heart is in a fever—mind you, in my aim to save, if not to win, you shall be steadfast!"

The count meditated a moment in astonishment at the depth and intensity of the other's passion. Then he said, "You know I cannot compel my cousin, but I will do all I can."

"Will you work as earnestly for me as I have striven for you?"

"So far as my efforts can be made to apply I will."

"*To apply*," echoed Oliverotto, "I and Pietro and Titolano did not talk thus coolly five nights since when we resolved your rescue."

A shadow gathered in Savelli's eyes. "Where is Pietro?" he asked.

"Arrested on suspicion before he had been in the castle two hours."

"And Titolano?"

"Was seized last Monday as a supposed spy. He came disguised as a friar—pardie, he looked like anything else!"

"And then?" ejaculated the other.

"And then," concluded Oliverotto, impassively, "he was taken before Monsignor Roccamura, and that afternoon they whipped him to death. But enough. Though willing to risk the gallows again for Elvira, to hazard once for you is sufficient. Shift for yourself now. I shall have left this castle ere noon." And so saying he rapped on the prison door, which, a moment after, was again closed and bolted behind him.

The sun was at the meridian when Monsignor Roccamura and his suite rode across the bridge of St. Angelo attended by their battalion of men of war, steel-clad and bearing a forest of pikes. The commendatore had exchanged his riding costume of the morning for a suit of velvet embroidered with gold. The way led through narrow streets, by the Corso, to what is now the Piazza del Popolo, outside the gate of which the monsignor stationed his followers.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century the approach to Rome by the Ponte Molle was along a country road between almost vacant fields. A few common buildings stood where now an almost continuous row of houses lines the street; and where to-day extend the alluring groves of the Borghese Villa, stretched meadow lands interspersed with clumps of trees.

The Piazza del Popolo bore no resemblance in 1500 to its present aspect. The Monte Pincio was a deserted waste; where is now the Ripetta were canebrakes, the refuge of water-fowl. There was neither obelisk nor fountain, nor the twin churches of Santa Maria. Even the gate was of different form and the church of Santa Maria del Popolo was the only building in view. There was no Villa Medici, no obelisk upon Trinità dei Monti. To the left a lane, now called *il Babuino*, led to vegetable gardens, converted two centuries later to the Piazza

di Spagna; there was no Propaganda, no Barcaccia, no flight of steps. The Corso was a broad track deriving its name from the races which at Carnival time were run upon it by buffaloes, by Barbary steeds, and by half-naked Jews; where now stands the Palazzo Sciarra, it was spanned by the Arch of Claudius — beyond was the Palazzo di Venezia —in appearance but little altered; there was no regular line of houses, and not one of the palaces of the modern nobility had yet been built from the wreck of ancient Rome. The general condition of the city was little better than its abject state of one hundred years before. Exposed to fires and inundations, decimated by pestilence, the buffet of interminable wars, massacred by hirelings, outraged by the nobles, pillaged by the Popes, tortured, poisoned, drowned in the Tiber—how low indeed had fallen the Populus Romanus! So great had been the devastation that the locality of the Forum had become a matter of conjecture, and the Mons Capitolinus was known as the sheep pasture of Monte Caprino, upon whose crest stood the solitary church of Ara Cœli.

The calvacade sent by Duke Ercole of Ferrara to receive the bride of his son Alfonso had halted at the bridge; it comprised five hundred persons, all weary enough as their jaded steeds brought them to the end of a fourteen days' winter journey through the Apennines, over difficult mountain

roads, in the face of dust and rain, and often with but insufficient shelter at night. But to-day they had donned fresh gala dresses, and filling the air with music, marshalled themselves for a triumphal entrance. Two thousand horse and foot came to their rencontre, forming on either side their line of march. Nearer the gate advanced the bride's redoubtable brother Cesare Borgia, already famous, though aged but twenty-seven years. He was dressed in purple velvet lined with violet, and wore a gold belt. He was mounted on a superb charger, caparisoned with trappings studded with gold and precious stones. Behind him followed a procession of four thousand men—gentlemen on horseback, his own body-guard of arquebusiers, the squadron of Turkish light horse, troopers, pikemen—all in successive groups, brilliant alike in costume and weapons. Last of all came the Swiss Guard, instituted in 1475 by Sixtus the Fourth, and still somewhat of a novelty in their costume of black and yellow velvet, which differed but little from that designed for them in 1540 by Michael Angelo. Upon the approach of Cardinal Hypolite, the commander of the Ferrarese, and Don Ferrante, brother of the groom, for whom he appeared as proxy, Cesare sprang to the ground, and hastening forward to meet his father's illustrious guests, embraced each of them on both cheeks. This formality over, they rode on together to the gate where a large assem-

blage of prelates was in waiting, and where addresses of welcome lasting two hours were made. At length the motley and much enduring host filed into the Corso, and crossing the bridge of St. Angelo amid salvos of artillery, approached the Vatican, from a window of which Pope Alexander Sixth, his daughter Lucretia, and the beautiful Giulia Farnèse, observed their arrival.

While Alexander, attended by a dozen cardinals, received the ambassadors, Don Ferrante, conducted by Cesare Borgia, was led to a vast stairway, at the top of which waited Lucretia, robed in white and resting on the arm of an old courtier. Her dress was heavily embroidered with gold; from her shoulders hung a brown velvet cape fringed with fur; the narrow sleeves of brocade were slashed after the Spanish fashion; her hair was bound with a fillet of gold, supporting two rows of pearls; around her shapely throat she wore a heavy collar from which hung an uncut ruby. The Ferrarese envoy lost no time in writing home his agreeable impressions. "She showed herself discreet and amiable, good natured and respectfully devoted to your excellency and to the illustrious Don Alfonso. Moreover, she possesses a finished grace in all her accomplishments, which is veiled by a modest diffidence. Her beauty would be amply sufficient, even were it not enhanced by a rare charm of manner. She is also a perfect Christian;

to-morrow she goes to confession, and receives the Eucharist at Christmas."

Among the hundreds assembled at the Vatican was Monsignor Roccamura. He found the great audience-chamber filled with the concourse of the Ferrarese and of the Papal Court. His Holiness, in the splendor of jewelled vestments, received the envoys with smiling cordiality, bade them welcome, and gave assurance that this marriage occasioned him the liveliest satisfaction, which was, for once, the truth. He was still a handsome man, with fresh, rosy face and luminous brown eyes, though the years with their burden had whitened his hair and bent a little his figure. Standing about were knots of officers and courtiers and the ambassadors of France and Spain and Venice, and at the end of the hall sat Alexander's far-famed favorite, Giulia Farnèse, surrounded by a group of ladies and cavaliers. They were talking in the familiar form of conversation of that time, half of elaborate circumlocution, half of outspoken freedom that would be startling to modern ears.

"For my part," said the Contessina Gallinara from behind her fan, "I do not like the Venetian, nor any of his compatriots—they are all flatterers."

"It is evident, my dear," said Giulia, "that he has not flattered you enough."

"Nay," said Cardinal Corneto, till recently con-

fidential secretary to the Pope, and whose appreciation of youth and beauty had deepened in proportion as wrinkles and infirmities had come to him, "the signorina should not take offence if men now and then forget a delicate reserve and tell her what all feel and all were fain to say."

"It is to be hoped then for the virtue of Trastevere," answered Giulia, "that all young men have not the good intentions of ambassadors and cardinals. But here," she added, "comes a wench, I warrant, would cajole austerity itself."

The lady thus referred to was Elvira d'Este, who some hours before had been the subject of Oliverotto's hasty discourse with Savelli. Arrived from Ferrara a few days previously, she was one of the guests at Court. Her coming had been unannounced, and so sudden a departure was explained only by her attachment of years ago for Lucretia, when as girls they studied at the convent of San Sisto; for Italians of the sixteenth century were too civilized to ask questions upon delicate matters.

Giulia Farnèse was morbidly jealous of her venerable, yet quick affectioned lover, and towards the Countess of Este this feeling had sprung to a furious passion at the mere suspicion that the youthful Elvira had designs upon the favors of the Pontiff, an ambition of which she assumed every woman capable. Elvira had entered attended by a Spanish officer named Brazos, at the side of whose

broad proportions her lithe figure gained something beyond its usual grace.

Cesare Borgia had returned to this apartment some minutes before, and at this moment the visitor, who had been conversing with him, and who was the Venetian envoy referred to by the ladies, bowed and withdrew; Roccamura immediately advanced and greeted his master with dignified salutation.

"May I have many years, you say," replied the other; "so hope I, though fortune has brought us to troubled waters. Between the French and the Spaniards, next spring will wear a grim visage; worst of all we have to beware of some who are not open foes;" then, as if conscious of an indiscreet utterance, he pursued hastily with an amused expression, "this schemer Zorzi has been talking to me about the seizure of Savelli; he thinks it covers some political stroke, as if we were not sufficiently in alliance with the Orsini; well, well, hold you the prisoner safe the while."

"He must be bird or lizard to leave the tower of St. Angelo," answered Roccamura, and he bowed again as with a pleasant salute Cesare turned away and moved toward a conservatory filled with plants and tropical birds, whither the ladies and some of the men had sought refuge from the throng.

"You are fortunate, as ever, to-night," said Mon-

signor Roccamura to Brazos, who was passing by, "always the favorite of beauty."

"Favorite, indeed," laughed the other; "would that I were so; when I look upon the marbles of your sculptors I sigh to think they may not love or be loved, but when I gaze on the lady of Este, I would fain turn her to marble that her form might endure, even though in heartless beauty."

"Sentimentalizing," retorted Roccamura, as he slapped the other condescendingly on the shoulder, "we shall have you writing sonnets anon, or singing ditties with your cross-bowmen for chorus."

Cesare Borgia made his way to the side of Elvira d'Este, who was standing alone in the midst of palms and clustering flowers. She looked up as he joined her, and one less well informed than we might have supposed her awaiting his coming. "Fair cousin," said he, taking her half playfully, half gallantly by the hand, which he raised to his lips, "you are not pleased at the sight of so many strangers."

She let her hand rest upon his for a moment ere slowly withdrawing it she said: "What should I care for strangers so I knew myself welcome to you?"

"And what marvellous circumstance makes you think yourself otherwise? Do not Giulia's sour looks show that you are only too welcome?"

"Then you do not think it overbold in me to have come unbidden?"

"You shall not easily leave us," answered Cesare.

"What would the gossips say?" replied the girl with a laugh and a faint flush; "and so I shall return to Ferrara as soon as I dare."

"As soon as you dare!" exclaimed Cesare, "what strange words are these?"

"It is too long a story, nor will you think it a pretty romance when told."

"And when shall I hear it?"

"At the opportunity," she answered with an expressive glance, as she moved away towards a group of ladies.

Shortly before the Ave Maria—when the wintry yellow of the western sky had turned to rose that deepened to gray on the Alban hills—a banquet was served at which several hundred guests assembled, Cesare Borgia presiding in his father's place. Later in the evening the musicians of the palace filled the air—now with martial strains that stirred the blood to fire, now with the light refrains of the dance.

The revelling was at its merriest and the bells of a dozen churches had sounded midnight, when Cesare passed unobserved to a terrace and gained a path that led through an orange grove at the side

of the Vatican gardens. A few steps brought him to a gate which opened on a narrow vicolo. Here he paused and clapped his hands softly together. The signal was repeated from the other side, and the duke thereupon lifted the heavy iron latch which fastened the gate on the inner side, and passing out closed it behind him. A tall sinewy man with a rough cloak about his shoulders, and a felt hat slouched upon his brow, stood in the path, and raising his hand in salutation, led the way through a succession of dark and narrow alleys, till a man shrouded like himself stepped from a doorway and said "Capitano."

The individual thus addressed whispered to Cesare, "Go with him; up stairs are your weapons and equipment, and I shall await you at the bottom of this lane where the horses are ready."

Cesare did as he was desired, and presently emerged by a ladder into a room of such considerable size that the wick which flickered in its midst only partially revealed the furniture and objects ranged along the walls.

"Ah, Canzio," he exclaimed to his guide who bowed obsequiously, "at last I see who it is; and art thou to go with us to-night?"

"No, maestro mio, to-night I keep house."

"Keep house do you?" echoed Valentino, as he drew on a pair of riding boots and replaced his velvet coat with a leather doublet. And glancing

round, he observed indistinctly the close-barred windows, the rude table and half dozen chairs, the sombre presses against the walls, the racks of weapons in the corner. "So this is your house, is it? You see I have come to pay you a visit."

"It is an honor to make us immortal."

Cesare buckled on a rapier, and feeling his way down the ladder, presently reached the end of a lane, where through the darkness could be distinguished the forms of men and horses. The Capitano del Nero ordered one of his men to ride ahead, directed two others to follow, and took his place beside Valentino. "Half-way to Rocca Savello," he said, "is a stone house where are more of my fellows, and there we can find shelter or reinforcement if required. In a glade not far from Boscobel will be two men with provisions; a cavalcade like this should not be large—it is best to avoid too many clattering hoofs."

The observant Giulia Farnèse did not notice Cesare's absence for half an hour, and the thought of him was recalled to her by seeing Elvira d'Este listening to the small talk of a young officer and of an old dignitary of the palace. She had supposed them together all this while, and her suspicions again took fire. It was the father, not the son, that this designing girl was setting her cap at. At this moment passed Don Michele di Careglia, Borgia's

trusted counsellor, and often his right hand in action.

"Where is Cesare?" she asked abruptly.

He could not repress a smile, whether at her eagerness, or that the substance of his answer seemed droll to him, as he said, "A sudden call upon urgent affairs; he had to be gone at a moment's notice."

The alertness of anger and mistrust faded for an instant from the Farnèse's sparkling eyes, and she seemed not insensible to some veiled humor in this simple reply.

She crossed the room presently to where one of Lucretia's court ladies was standing an apparently indifferent spectator.

"Donna Catalina," she began, "have you the mind to do me a service?"

"At your command, my lady," assented the other, the shadow of mature years vanishing at the words which followed.

"You shall have this ring when it is completed. Yonder girl of Este needs an eye upon her; who knows but she might do something indiscreet that we should guard her from? It would be well to see that ——"

"Enough," interrupted the other, with a malevolent look towards the unsuspecting subject of their words—"her chamber door shall not open or shut without my knowledge."

Cesare and his escort passed the walls of Trastevere, trotted in the starlight by the road that at this day leads beside the Tiber to the Ponte Molle, and there crossed to the left bank of the river. As they passed, the guard at the bridge raised his hand to del Nero, who with his companions drew rein.

"Have you three men in advance?" he asked.

"No," said the condottiere, "only one."

"Yes, Filipe—he is just in front; but ten minutes ago two men close muffled, on horses as good as yours, galloped over the bridge, took to the left yonder and disappeared."

Borgia and his condottiere attendant sought in vain for an explanation of this circumstance; to men habitually surrounded by dangers, everything unusual assumes the aspect of a menace; and it was not till after a moment's reflection that Cesare exclaimed—"Bah, none but you and I and Filipe know where we are going; what have we to do with who prowls Campania at midnight?"

"Some belated men of the Pazzi Castle, doubtless," chimed in del Nero; "we do not pass near there."

"Forward then," said Cesare, and they put spurs to their horses. Sometimes they rode over the broad spectral plain of Campania, now in some defile, now crossing a watercourse. At the stone house near Torre Tre Teste they halted: "Maestro," said del Nero, "I will offer you here a cup of

hot wine; these fields reek with fever." As he spoke, his men advanced and one of them said—

"There are others abroad to-night."

"How many?" asked the condottiere.

"Two."

"What direction?"

"To the hills yonder; we durst neither speak nor fire, and they passed at a canter."

"The same that crossed the bridge," said Valentino; "let us hasten on, we can overtake them—five to two;" and he drained the goblet of mulled wine.

"We will pursue in force then," said del Nero; "mount the three of you," he said, "and follow: how much start have they?"

"Less than fifteen minutes," was the answer, and the cavalcade, now reinforced, galloped rapidly in the direction taken by the mysterious horsemen. But whether their horses were better, whether they turned in some other course, no trace of them was discoverable.

Two hours later, at break of day, they sighted the white houses of Rocca Savello.

"It is a pleasure to behold the daylight," murmured Cesare half to himself.

"Ah yes," exclaimed the condottiere captain at his side, whose quick ear caught the words. "Sacred for me is the joy of the sunrise these last nine years."

"And why nine years?" asked the duke.

"Because, signore, its rising on the day I think of dispelled an eternity of darkness and doubt, and even the shadow of death. I was with one Cristofero Colombo, a name famous in Spain. For days I sailed with him through seas till then unknown, amid the perils of the deep, with only the cheerless horizon by day, and surrounded at night by uncouth monsters that rose from the waves. Our stores failed, no hope pointed the way, we drifted week after week, severed as it seemed from earth—on into space as vague as eternity. Despair fell on me, a thousand hideous phantoms beset my dreams and made the reality of waking the worst nightmare of them all. One evening we caught a glimpse of something like a sparkle of fire, and with the dawn was revealed land—the land that to us was life."

"I have heard much of this," said Cesare, "it was the nearer side of the golden Indies."

"Aye, and the light was the glitter the savages make tossing great ingots in play."

"But you did not get the ingots," observed Cesare.

"Maestro," replied the other, "it is a land of mystery, and the people make their treasures vanish with the wish. And so with the fountain of youth; we sought for it, that returning home we might be—if not rich at least light hearted; but

one of their chiefs drank it dry, and when we came there was nothing but rocks, bare rocks."

"He, at least," said Cesare, "must have become a child; but could you find no way to make the savages give up their treasure?"

"Our capitano," replied del Nero, "would not let us have our ways; we roasted a couple of them, but even this Colombo stopped. He is, indeed, a strange man—great, but by his greatness unsettled in his mind."

CHAPTER II.

A MORNING CALL.

CRESTING a spur of the Alban hills stood, at the time we write of, the fortified Castle of Rocca Savello, then the stronghold of the Savelli family. Its picturesque situation in the midst of olive groves, veiled the misproportions of towers and outworks which had been added piecemeal by successive occupants, and after occasional sieges and dismantlings. Its present owner was Count Isidore Savelli, recently a prisoner, as we have seen, in the Castle of St. Angelo, and a staunch adherent of the Colonna family, which, with the Orsini, kept up an enduring strife in the troubled bosom of the Church.

For some years Count Isidore had been a prominent figure in the events of his time; the heart-burnings caused him by the wife whom he loved—and who loved the world, had made him a morose and embittered man, and at a relatively early age he had abandoned all pursuits and retired with her to this spot, amid the quiet of the hills and the silence of the vast Campania, where, withdrawn from the ways of life, he could be spared

the pangs which the meaning admiration of others caused him. In the time of her greatest triumphs, his bitter cup had been to stand afar and watch the worship of her, and often she gave him this measure to the full.

To his wife this retreat had seemed a cruel deprivation, the more as her only offending had been in the gratification of vanity and the pride of a beauty which had filled Italy with its renown. But her tears and repinings had been in vain.

But though Count Isidore now held his treasure aloof, he did not delude himself that the excitement of adulation, of friendship which trembled beyond the Platonic, could be extinguished by seclusion. The isolation could not be made so complete but that some echoes floated in from the world of pleasure and gallantry — some shadow brooded ominously on the border-land of his retirement. And yet they were but echoes and shadows, so watchful was his vigilance, so faithful his men at arms. Six months had elapsed, during which it seemed no one of all those cavaliers who whilom sought Ginevra's hand in the dance, or followed with her in the falcon hunt, or sang in the starlight beneath her window, had ventured within the glades of Boscobel. But at length this calm was broken. One morning his wife's maid, an elderly woman, with expressionless face and cold gray eyes, came to him and said:

"Master, the signora has given me this letter and ten crowns."

He drew a purse from his girdle; "Here are three Spanish ducats," he answered: then opening the letter, he read these words:

I dare not see you. You must not write again—I receive your letters at too terrible a risk. How selfish you must think me, and yet you say you love me still. Dear friend, I am unworthy of so much devotion—and yet I have a heart, I believe, after all. Let me at least have respect from you if love be sin. Seek to forget me—farewell.

Savelli read this feminine epistle without change of feature till the last line; then he broke into a chuckling laugh. "She has a heart after all," he repeated. Turning to the woman, he asked abruptly, "For whom was this?"

"Duke Cesare Borgia—il Valentino some call him," she answered.

"And what," pursued the count, "of these letters that she had from him?"

"I know nothing of them," replied the other.

"How could they have reached her?"

"The mistress is shrewd; she does not always travel the same road, nor use the same hand for every service."

"We must watch," mused Isidore, "and mean-

while I will consider. Send this letter forward as you were bidden," he added, "and I shall make ready for Valentino."

"The seal is broken," objected the woman.

"True," he assented, fixing his eyes upon the impression of a harp surrounded with the motto, "*Je reponds a qui me touche*," which Ginevra had affixed. Stepping to a writing-table, he folded the sheet as before, and covering it with fresh wax, pressed upon it a die which produced in its stead a thistle. Struck with the aptness of this transformation, he chuckled to himself as before.

His preparations for Borgia's irruption were still in the stage of contemplation when, on the following afternoon, he strolled for an hour through his garden, plunged in what would have been an overpowering melancholy, but for the rage of jealousy and hate which filled him; besides the neighboring villagers of Albano, he had a company of forty armed men, and as lovers do not pay surreptitious visits with an army jingling in steel and brass at their back, his force would more than equal Borgia's escort. But would he come, and if so, when? His wife's letter was as plain a summons as woman ever wrote. Would their rendezvous be in the park, or in the castle? Enough to keep close watch upon her, to have his little corps always on the *qui vive*. And Borgia, once in his power—for his meditation assumed this conclusion

—what should be done with him? Should he be carried to some remote Colonna stronghold and kept there in a dungeon till life wasted? Should he give himself the luxury of one deep plunge of the stiletto—how deep it should strike! Or should he tear out the eyes that had gazed with desire upon his Ginevra?

He never knew how it happened—it was all so quickly done; in the midst of his meditations, strong arms seized him from behind, something was thrown over his head, there was the noise of hurrying footsteps, he was down, pinioned, borne away. His instinctive thought, the first struggle over, was of Ginevra left alone to Valentino—and at that the faintness of despair possessed him. His own danger never suggested itself till after del Nero and his band had delivered him within the gate of St. Angelo; then, as we have seen, he refused to eat till another had partaken of the food. Whatever Ginevra's weariness of Boscobel, her husband's peril found her true. The announcement that he had vanished did not greatly astonish her, but she wrote to his captor—"hurt him in any way or so much as injure his health, and you shall never see me more." It was, as Cesare commented, the old familiar feminine perverseness.

The face and statuesquely graceful figure of Ginevra, as she appeared at the time of her great-

est fame and triumphs, have been preserved on canvas by an unknown hand. The attention of the most indifferent visitor to the Doria Gallery must be attracted by the ideal loveliness of that rare and subtly smiling countenance. One may not know if perchance some chemical change has affected the colors, or if, in life, her violet eyes had the barely perceptible tinge of emerald with which they look from the picture. The effect is to lend a feline cast to the expression. The workmanship of the picture is carried out with elaborate minuteness of detail, with lingering touch, with exquisite refinement of finish. The peach-flushed cheeks, the curved lips, the soft chestnut-brown hair, the shapely neck bared at the throat after the fashion of the day—all are rendered with such delicate appreciation, that one may suspect the unknown artist had himself been fascinated by the form and features he had been employed to paint, and that in accomplishing his task he has left to us the image of a face he adored.

The apartments in which she had spent her monotonous days had balconies packed with growing flowers, and were shaded by curtains which gave a hue of crimson to their interior; in each were rich and curious ornaments. On the walls hung tapestries and embroideries and fancy work from her own hand, made by the blending together of specimens of rare materials of sparkling and iridescent

and crystalline light and color, so that the effect rivalled the brilliancy and the glory of a butterfly's wing. A cabinet contained porcelains from France, glass goblets from Bohemia and Germany, and ivory carvings; on a small bracket stood a diminutive Cupid, in one corner leaned a lute—and on the ceiling were frescoed figures—girls and youths dancing amid clouds that betokened no coming of shadow or storm.

The sun was well above the horizon when Cesare rose from a light repast served him in the glen of which del Nero had spoken, and where, as he had assured, men were in waiting with provisions. He called the condottiere to him and said,

"Capitano, you tell me you have stationed six of your men in sight of the postern; that makes us then sixteen here in all."

"Yourself, and fifteen of us."

"And the guard at the gate?"

"Has been withdrawn at sight of the signal."

Still Valentino hesitated. "This may prove a venturesome errand," he said; "three remain here with the horses, three on watch in the wood; you and the eight others will follow me at a distance and wait in hiding near the little gate by which I enter, and of which you must keep possession. If you hear the note of this whistle, make your way to me with your fellows."

Half an hour's walk through the grounds called Boscobel, brought Cesare to the castle, at the side entrance of which the old servant Marietta was waiting.

"Heaven prosper your grace," she said, with a curtsey; "may your way be always as open and joyous as this path to the rooms where my lady awaits you;" and she fixed her stony eyes on his face with a furtive expression of nervous excitement.

"Thou hast performed thy part well," said the duke, as he dropped some gold pieces in her hand.

The woman watched his figure while it remained in view; then softly she closed the door and locked it on the outer side, muttering as she did so, "Merciful Madonna, what a rapier he carries! but he will find it a heavy morning's work. And Ginevra! the saints have mercy on her, for Savelli will take her life this day—the madman he is! He must have gotten safely up the private stairs; should I have warned her? no, my duty was with him, alone, just escaped from the clutch of his enemies—their blood be upon them. An old woman like me trembles at the thought of the coming hour—I will go as far as the church and light a double taper;" and so saying, she dropped the key in her pocket and walked away. She had proceeded but a few paces when a quick step was heard, and glancing back, she saw the condottiere captain at her heels.

"A pleasant stroll to you," he said, in a jeering tone; "but that key in your pocket is unnecessary weight."

"Who are you?" ejaculated the frightened woman, "and what key do you talk about?"

"Enough spoken," said the condottiere, as his hand dropped carelessly on the hilt of his stiletto. "You have locked the gate by which one who has entered will presently need to come out. You will wait with us now, and if anything befalls—I bury this blade in your body."

A grave and stolid maestro di casa awaited Cesare in the court, and led the way up the stairs. His heart beat quicker as he passed the portal of Ginevra's apartment, and hers may have fluttered at the sound of his approaching step. She rose as he entered, advanced to meet him with a quick half-frightened smile of pleasure, gazed fixedly in his face for one instant, then gave him her hand, which he raised to his lips. He was the first to speak as she seated herself, at the same time motioning him to a chair.

"It is a year since we parted," he said; "a year of silence and of waiting since that one delicious evening—do you remember, Ginevra?—when we walked along the terrace in the moonlight. Every instant of it comes back—how the touch of your hand thrilled me, my passionate words, even the

air that the mandolins were sobbing far off in the distance, and the tear that moistened your eyes as I spoke——"

"Cesare," interrupted the lady gravely, "you remember all that I bade you forget, or, if you could not dismiss these phantoms, at least not to distress me with them ever again."

"Does it distress you to have the love of a heart and the devotion of a life that for your sake would dare and suffer all?"

"Hush!" exclaimed Ginevra, "something tells me there is danger in this day for both of us."

"I am here," urged Valentino, "to face danger for you—death for myself if need be. But the man who would part us is far; what danger then threatens? Let us be serious and brave—you know what I mean"—and he caught the lady's hand in both his own.

"Oh, Cesare!" she cried, disengaging herself, "if you loved me you would not tempt me thus."

"I would persuade you only to relief, to happiness, to the joy of our lives united. Is that so horrible a fate? What is there that you cling to here?"

"I am a pure woman, and here is honor—can you understand?" she replied.

"Yes," answered the other, not regarding the sarcasm. "You women make your lives miserable from what you call duty."

"Is not that the noblest spring in our nature?" broke in Ginevra; "are you without it? are you insensible to the hopes which are centred upon you, of the splendid destiny that is yours if you will?"

"Say, rather, if we share it together."

"Nay," answered Ginevra, with a displeased look, "it seems vain to talk to you of what I think; to be one of those who shall drive the stranger from our soil, who shall help to make our cities once more free, and our country Italian—all Italian—that, were I a man, would be my aim, and now it is what I wish for the man I admire."

She sank back upon the canopy, and Cesare, emboldened, seated himself at her side.

"The night that we parted," said he, "you gave me a flower; it is here in this charm. Every day have I looked at it, every day has the sight of it seemed to me an augury."

"Would the remembrance of that fateful evening had faded with it!" exclaimed his companion. "Throw it away, and in its place I will give you another as a token that henceforth I follow you from afar, that the fame of every gallant deed will bring a pulse of joy to me." And rising to place a rose in his doublet, she bent her graceful head down upon him as he sat, till her hair brushed against his brow—and then, in that instant his heart kindled to a blaze.

He sprang to his feet, caught her unresisting in his arms—and their lips were together in a long embrace.

There was a tremulous movement of the curtain which draped a doorway, a sound like a sigh or a sob, but the lovers were conscious only of their own emotions.

Then she broke from him.

"Begone!" she passionately exclaimed, "it has been the misfortune of my life that I ever met you—never let me see your face again."

"That means you love me as I do you," exclaimed Cesare.

"Love you! no, I cannot. I have not the heart to love. You have a sort of fascination for me—what more can I say in my weakness. I should not be a woman and deny the sweetness of being loved. Cesare, my heart is very full—I dare not tell you all—but you must leave me—all is over between us—we must meet no more forever." And with a sob she raised his hand to her lips, then struggling back and away from his arms, which sought to enclasp her, she overthrew the little Cupid from its resting-place on the bracket, and which, in falling, was shattered.

"Behold the omen," she exclaimed—"there can be no love between us."

"Say, rather, that, Cupid's service being done, there is no further need of him."

"Enough," answered Ginevra abruptly—"go, never come back, and forget me."

"Forget you," repeated Cesare; "how shallow must be your nature if you can so easily forget—how poorly must you think of mine. You repel me after having gone hand in hand with me to what moralists call a mental fault. I go—to wait till you summon me again, till you fill my life with yours." And he bent his lips upon the white hand she extended to him, then hastily turning, he left the room.

Down the steps and out into the sunlight went Valentino, vaguely conscious that Ginevra was further removed from him than ever, that by the fortitude of her own principle she was lost to him. For once, in this nature so corrupted with moral perverseness, the voice of a great passion had spoken. The obliquity of his conscience, added to the license of his time, hid from him all that was shameful in his attempt, and he experienced only the chagrin of failure, the disappointment of an ardent purpose frustrated.

His face was still flushed with excitement—his lips yet felt the electric thrill of the kisses he had snatched from Ginevra's—when, issuing from the cortile, he came in view of a figure, the sight of which instantly effaced every thought that was throbbing through his brain, and thrust upon him one of the critical moments of life. Before him,

with his back to the postern gate, stood Savelli, a drawn sword in his hand, his face in a flame of fury, his eyes bloodshot, a tumult of rage choking his utterance, so that he stood there silent, desperate, terrible. The amazement which flashed upon Cesare at sight of his prisoner passed with the thought; he was accustomed to deal with facts, and there was no leisure for surprise. Quickly as he halted, he raised his silver whistle and blew a shrill note that reached far over the grounds of Boscobel.

Savelli was upon him before the sound ceased, but Cesare was ready with his rapier, and parried with a turn of the wrist the other's first desperate lunge; both were accomplished swordsmen, Cesare more in practice than his opponent, who, besides, was so blinded by rage that in nearly all his passes he exposed himself to a quick return, had not the other maintained a strict defensive. And now were heard the beat of hurrying footsteps and the clink of weapons. Savelli's men had stealthily resumed their stations at the gate from which the command of Ginevra had withdrawn them, while others came pouring into the cortile. At the same instant, del Nero's condottieri dashed through the postern behind which they had lurked unnoticed. At sight of the odds gathering about him, Valentino caught his opponent's blade with a deft *froissement*, and thrust him through the shoulder. The wounded

man's arm failed, Valentino dashed by him, and springing through the *mêlée*, stood in the midst of his men. Two of the garrison had been disabled by the superior swordsmanship of the condottieri, their chief was *hors de combat*, they saw before them the dreaded Duke of Romagna, and they paused.

"Spare yourself a useless loss," called this latter to a lieutenant of Count Isidore; "molest us no further, and I and my men will withdraw."

The appearance of four more of del Nero's bravos, who had been left in reserve, and who had heard the shouts of the combatants, decided the wavering garrison; Cesare and his men passed out at the gate, which they heard barred behind them. As they walked, del Nero said, "The woman you spoke with locked the postern behind you—here she is, she would not speak, though I tried persuasion."

Marietta lay on the ground in the midst of some trees, and the process of persuasion had evidently been painful. Borgia bent over her, and at sight of him she raised her head.

"You locked the gate?" he asked.

She nodded in silence, and a gleam of triumphant malice came in her face.

Cesare turned to the condottieri who stood near, and curtly bade them move on.

"You knew the count had escaped?"

"He appeared this morning—more like a ghost than a man."

"And you betrayed me?"

"His wife betrayed you."

"What!" cried Cesare, for an instant deceived. "Ginevra knew——"

"She whispered to me you should be none other's," answered Marietta, with a groan; "it was she planned the attack in the court; it was she ordered me to fasten the gate that none should help you."

"False hag!" cried Borgia furiously—then his voice softened almost to compassion, "is it with such ingratitude thou wouldst repay me and serve thy mistress?"

But the old woman closed her eyes, and answered no more. She had sped her Parthian shaft in return for the torments of del Nero, and she lapsed suddenly to indifference or unconsciousness—one could not well have determined which.

The condottiere chief grew impatient over this dialogue, and called to his patron that their danger was not past, that they should hasten to put distance between them and the soldiers, who could be seen peering after them from the rampart. The words recalled Borgia, and presently they rode together across the bright fields of the Campania amid silence broken only by the cawing of crows, the twittering of birds, the occasional barking of dogs. Behind lay the Alban hills, a graceful outline of purpling gray against the sky. Twice they

rode in sight of mounted parties like their own; twice they passed herds of the impassive Roman cattle. Above was the liquid blue of Italy; around them a desolation haunted with fragmentary traces of a vanished world. On dismounting in the court of the Vatican, Borgia asked for Don Michele, who presently waited upon him in his room.

"How did it happen?" he asked simply.

"He became possessed of a file and a rope-ladder," answered the Spaniard, "and we found written in charcoal on his table—

"'*THE SARCASTIC WAYS OF FATE.*'"

CHAPTER III.

THE BORGIAS.

On the morning succeeding the foregoing events, Pope Alexander VI.—Rodriguez Borgia—was occupied in one of the many chambers in the Vatican set apart for the purposes of affairs. On a table lay a pile of unopened letters and despatches, while on either hand were arranged those already considered in two heaps, the one reserved for further perusal, the other intended for the hands of his secretaries.

He had been busy thus since dawn, between papers and occasional brief reveries, and now and then a turn up and down the long room. From early manhood he had been attentive to business, and assiduous to its demands whenever his personal interests were affected. As matters of importance increased in proportion as station and power had been absorbed in his grasp, his devotion to the charms of beautiful women had diminished. To the abstemiousness of his habits in other particulars must be attributed his capacity for unflagging application. When affairs of state were to be treated, envoys received, finances considered, or

some machination set afoot, he was himself wont to say that day and night were the same. He drank only pure red wine, and his midday meal consisted of a broth followed by one dish of meat, a couple of vegetables, and cheese and cakes to end with. The ambassadors thought it penance to dine with a sovereign who feasted them thus sparingly.

The crisis of his life had been at his election to the Papacy; for this he had manipulated and promised beforehand, bribed without stint at the decisive moment, and rewarded magnificently after the triumph. His greatest chagrin had been in the death of his eldest son, the Duke of Gandia, whose assassination had been brought about by his brother Cesare. The corpse of this ill-fated youth was carried to the Vatican covered with the ooze of the Tiber, and with half a dozen sword thrusts from back to front.

Summoned to his father's presence, Cesare assumed the act with cold assurance. He gave his motive without concealment—ambition to be without competitor in the task he proposed to himself, to carve a dukedom in the centre of Italy of which he should be the head, independently of the Holy See. In the hour of anguish which followed, Alexander shrank horror-struck before his terrible son, and from that instant Cesare's ascendency over his father became established.

From this time he had completely fallen in with Cesare's designs, and the latter had executed the initiatory part of his project with vigor and rapidity and with military skill. From Pesaro was driven Giovanni Sforza, Lucretia's first husband. The Marches of Romagna, comprising the towns of Imola, Faenza, and Forlì, had been occupied, after more or less resistance, and in them was now quartered an army of condottieri mercenaries, faultless in arms, perfect in discipline so long as danger was near, valorous so far as those can be who fight only for pay and plunder, of doubtful adhesion in adversity, as had already often appeared in the campaigns of Southern Europe.

The last success upon which Alexander had set his heart was some brilliant marriage for Lucretia. Since the conquest of Naples by the French, the outcast house of Aragon had become a threadbare alliance, and as the young Alfonzo would not consent to a divorce, he was set upon one afternoon on the stairs of the Vatican, and found apparently moribund an hour after. Borne to his wife's apartment, Lucretia swooned at the sight, and Alexander, hastily called, blanched in recognizing again the handiwork of his sanguinary offspring. There is reason to believe that Lucretia sincerely loved this her second husband, so far as her shallow nature was capable of affection. She watched at the side of the wounded youth, tending him zeal-

ously, till slowly his robust constitution brought him towards consciousness. On the second day Cesare heard of this, and in the night entered the sick-room, followed by two sbirri, drove Lucretia and her sister-in-law Sancia into an inner chamber, cynically exclaiming—"that which failed by day shall be done at night," and stabbed the helpless Alfonzo to death.

The way was now open for another transfer of Lucretia, as an investment is changed according as circumstances render expedient. She was allowed to withdraw with her grief—Infelicissima, she signs her letters at this time—to Spoleto, where for a few weeks she cherished a lively aversion for her brother. In her absence, Alexander and Cesare made tender of her hand to the son of the Duke of Ferrara. To their mortification the proposal was flatly refused—not only with emphasis, but with disgust. The bastard daughter of a profligate Pope, with one husband divorced and one murdered, with a red-handed fratricide for a brother, and the reputation of a virtue not above suspicion, was scarce the wife desired by Ferrara for the scion of its house.

But the Borgias were not easily to be deterred: as an alliance, this marriage would be greatly to their advantage, and as placing a friendly state between the new acquisitions of Cesare and the rapacious jaws of the Venetian Lion of St. Mark,

it could not but prove of pre-eminent importance. Nor did they desist, father and son, till they had brought about this union, although under the not flattering condition that Lucretia should bring a dower of three hundred thousand ducats, equal in our time to half a million pounds sterling—enough silver coating to make the nauseating pill go down.

The sorrowing widow of Alfonzo of Aragon—the Infelicissima in her Spoleto retreat—so far plucked up spirit as to take an active and efficient share in smoothing aside some after-difficulties that supervened. The Ferrarese princes (Duke Ercole and his son Alfonzo) and their representatives at Rome, until the consummation of the marriage, continued to look upon their bargain with deep-rooted mistrust. In this they were in harmony with the prevailing sentiment, that whoever dealt with the Borgias must expect to be deceived in a more or less costly or sanguinary degree.

The character of Lucretia has until recently been so exclusively considered that of a frenzied adulteress using poniard and poison in all directions, and consumed by bursts of tremendous passion, that we can only accustom ourselves gradually to the portrait of her as drawn by her Roman contemporaries, as indicated in her letters, and as outlined by the diplomatic agents of Fer-

rara, who, in speaking what they deem blunt truth, take evident satisfaction in reciting their agreeable impressions.

There is no fragment of evidence that she ever committed, or abetted, or desired the murder of a human being; her sternest critic, writing during her life-time, makes no such charge; her crimes began to be committed a couple of centuries after her death, in the minds of her commentators. In Ferrara, where Donizetti and Victor Hugo lay the scene of her supposed atrocities, she lived for seventeen years—esteemed, honored, beloved—and died regretted by a community which, at the time of her arrival, was certainly not prepossessed in her favor. She was blonde, petite, sprightly, blue-eyed, auburn-golden haired. Her beauty, her accomplishments, her proficiency in the classics, her grace in the dance, her sweet and courtly manners, were acknowledged everywhere.

Her departure for Ferrara was an emancipation from the tutelage of her father and brother; with them she was pliant to the degree of nothing more than a tearful remonstrance when the husband she declares she loved was done to death before her eyes. The preparations for her new life had been conducted by her with delighted impatience, and with almost childish glee, so that she must quite have laid aside grieving for her Neapolitan husband—murdered six months and sixteen days be-

fore her marriage (by proxy of Don Ferrante) to Alfonzo of Ferrara.

El Prete gave a naive description of her a few days after the arrival of the Ferrarese. "The illustrious Madonna Lucretia is little seen, being absorbed with preparations for her departure. On Sunday evening, calling at the Vatican, I found her ladyship seated near her bed; in one corner of the room were a score of girls dressed in peasant costume, and near them were the ladies of honor to the number of ten. The dance was commenced by a gentleman of Valencia and a lady of the court, after which madonna danced very well and very gracefully with Don Ferrante. She wore a black velvet dress with gold tassels, tight sleeves, the dress cut open at the neck, showing an under garment of linen stitched with gold. About her neck was a sparkling collar; on her head floated an emerald gauze bound with rubies."

Pope Alexander Sixth was, at this time, advanced in years, though still of handsome face and commanding presence. In his prime he was remarkable for the elegance and suavity of his address, the refined and benignant beauty of his face, the pure and cultivated tenor of a conversation widely at variance with the habits of his life. Now grown to be an old man, even the shadows of conflicts and the remembrance of crimes could not banish an aspect of intellectual repose, of gentle amiability,

of power born to command. His health was still robust, his physical condition hale and vigorous. Apparently, no compunction, no regret, no sting of conscience, no thought of the travesty of his sensuous career upon his sacred office ever troubled the calm of that placid contentment. He lived now in the midst of diplomatic aspirations, of intrigues for the advancement of his children, and in the amorous companionship of the beautiful Giulia Farnèse.

His consideration of the letters before him was suspended on the entry of a confidential servant, who wheeled up a small table bearing the customary frugal breakfast of chocolate, toast, and eggs. He was a valuable member of the papal household—discreet, silent, save when spoken to, and mute upon irregular circumstances.

"When my son stirs," said the Pope, "say that I have need to speak with him."

"Is haste required?" enquired the other respectfully, but without form; "the duke returned tired from the dance last night, and said he would stay late abed this morning."

"It was but Wednesday," exclaimed his Holiness, "he received the Ferrarese ambassadors lying on a couch, with the excuse, 'The fêtes, the fêtes;' and now, with urgent business, the drone takes to his bed. You must waken him at once."

The cameriere presently removed the breakfast

things, bowed, and withdrew. Half an hour after, the door opened again, and Cesare Borgia entered his father's study with a brief salutation, threw himself into a chair, and asked listlessly, "What ill news now?"

"Another letter from Candale at Imola," replied Alexander, "repeating what he said ten days since."

At these words the languor vanished from Cesare's bearing. His mien became instantly alert, intent, with eye cold and fixed, and lips compressed, though still with a trace of the cynical little smile familiar to them.

"He says," pursued the Pontiff, "that Vitellozzo does nothing but cast about to get another town for himself; that Oliverotto is filled with the same ambition and is at times absent from his command for weeks together, no one knows where; that Ramiro has driven the peasantry to despair with his cruelties and Pesaro to frenzy with his exactions. There is the letter, read for yourself."

The young man glanced over the parchment, then laid it down, and after a moment's reflection, said: "About Ramiro, the hills are full of brigands who call themselves peasants, and I bade him crucify some of them by the roadside; as to Pesaro, my troops must be paid; and for Vitellozzo and Oliverotto—that a condottiere chief wants a town to himself is no new story. When

this harlequinade is over, I will set out at once, and be at Imola in six days."

"The urgent necessity is to have regiments in your own pay instead of hiring bands that serve under uncontrollable leaders."

"That is always in my thoughts. You know the difficulties: these companies are hardened men at arms; to replace them with others of my own training would take two years—to make the change suddenly is to bring together recruits that the shock of a veteran corps like that of Vitellozzo would scatter. It is half a year since I commenced the formation of a division of my own at Imola, another at Faenza, and a troop of horse at Forlì, that having got rid first of the Swiss and next of the French, the condottiere bands may be replaced."

Almost before he had finished speaking, the Pope, whose attention had passed to another theme, unfolded a second letter, remarking, "Here is from Colonna. He vows he will raise an evil storm if Savelli be not set free."

"He is spared the trouble," answered Cesare, undisturbed; "Savelli escaped night before last, and is now somewhere in the Alban hills."

"So Michelotto told me; but what freak led you to seize him? What folly to edge the Colonna further."

"He was always plotting," answered Cesare—

then to shorten discussion upon this point, he said, "I am resolved to visit the French King at Milan; I will go there as soon as these alarms from Romagna are removed. For our leave to march through upon Naples, he must help us to dispose of many troublesome friends."

"That we will talk of and ponder long—there must be no mistake. Who knows were it not best to join with the Spaniards and Venice, give Milan to St. Mark, Naples to Ferdinand, and Tuscany to you? The Venetian ambassador is coming to talk about it again."

"Better join with both until it becomes possible to calculate their chances."

"It will be difficult," objected the Pope, "to impose long upon Louis, he is himself too guileful. But I will sound Zorzi further, and we will take counsel together before you leave. And now," he continued, with darkening face, "to the subject for which I called you; I was amazed yesterday at something the Venetian said. His remark was of no consequence, but—you remember that private letter King Louis wrote me at the end of last September?"

"It is in the secret space of the iron chest yonder, behind the painting of Ariadne."

"You have never removed it thence?"

"No."

"Nor spoken of it?"

"Never."

"Neither have I; yet Marin Zorzi showed that he knew its contents."

Cesare started with unfeigned surprise; his father eyed him curiously—narrowly; his son was hardly beyond suspicion of treachery even in a case like the present, where a weighty personal interest placed him above its reasonable attainment.

"Who," he asked, "besides ourselves, has knowledge of that box?"

"Only Corneto," replied the Pope; adding significantly, "even the workmen who made it no longer live."

"Had Corneto access to it?"

"No; only once or twice I took papers from it while he sat writing at this table. But he knows not the springs, nor can he even have seen the key. Besides, it were idle to suspect Corneto."

"Then the French have betrayed themselves in an unguarded moment."

"Or else," said Alexander, starting to his feet, "some one has discovered the chest, and learned to open the secret compartment."

"What papers have you there now?"

"None of importance. I took out the King's letter and a few other things last night, sealed the lid of the secret locker, far back, out of sight, so that it cannot now be opened without leaving positive trace."

Cesare shook his head disparagingly. "That is not enough," he said; "have some one concealed in the room."

"But whoever opened it," objected Alexander, "must be an important official in the Vatican, and I might confide the watching to some one in his employ."

"Leave that to me," replied his son; "del Nero's men are not to be trifled with, and two of them shall watch whenever you are absent—I will give the order, but beware how you enter in the dark." And with a hasty *felice giorno*, Cesare Borgia left the room.

On returning to his own apartment, he found Don Michele awaiting him; he was one of the two or three who received as much of Cesare's confidence—the conclusions of his silent night sessions—as he vouchsafed to any. "Cesare," says Machiavelli, "never communicates a thing until he orders it done."

Although the Duke of Valentino was, like his father, of frugal habits, however sumptuous might be his life before the world, yet his private rooms in the Vatican gave token of refined education and cultivated tastes, which make his crimes seem darker by very contrast. He had a passion for printed books, then still a rarity, was a collector of fine weapons, particularly arquebuses, in

the use of which he was an adept, touched the lute and the Spanish guitar agreeably, studied algebra as a pastime, and took delight in works of art, carvings and paintings of his own time, gems, bronzes, and vases from the antique.

He was still revolving his father's startling communication, and it was with a distrait air that he addressed to his lieutenant the familiar query—"Anything new?"

"An indication that may prove worth something," answered the Spaniard; "I have the name of the fellow who got Savelli out of the tower; he is an adventurer, by name Vallon d'Avrées."

"How did you learn this?"

"He obtained entrance to the castle as a scullion, asked leave to go out for an hour the day of the escape, and Rossi, who is always suspecting something, sent a boy to notice whither he went; he crossed the Ripetta and entered a house on the river. Last night I arrested the inmates and seized everything. A man and his wife in the mezzanino came out at once with the story that he had called for a letter; that none had been then received, but that this came later in the day."

Cesare read the address aloud:

"*Le Capitaine Vallon d'Avrées,*
chez le banquier Schmitt."

"A Jew usurer—and a cipher," he ejaculated, unfolding the paper, which bore the following:

Izby ux jvruz tzsl ryqpp io fngmblok bj dik hrgr fv eadd crbe af zjykzb.

"Yes," assented Don Michele, "I make nothing of it. Schmitt holds to it he knows not the man—that it is part of his trade to receive private letters and to charge a silver piece for their delivery. We could find nothing irregular in his belongings."

"We must have that letter read," mused Valentino.

"Suppose you try yourself," answered his companion.

"Yes, leave it with me," answered Cesare, taking the proposal seriously.

Don Michele mentally observed that the result of this study would be unsubstantial; then he said aloud: "I have set some fellows from the castle who saw this d'Avrées to watch the Ripetta on the chance of his coming back—which, of course, he will not be fool enough to do."

"Which he will do, five chances to one," answered Cesare; "he knows not he was followed, and will return for this letter."

"I have been thinking," said the Spaniard reflectively, "whether Pulcio might not be of use in this; he knows all the canaille with French names in the city."

"It is easy to say a word to him," mused Cesare; and as a servant entered at this moment announcing breakfast, he called to him, "Find Master Pulcio quickly, ask him to take a chocolada with me—say it waits ready."

Five minutes later, Pulcio the hunchback jester was ushered in, where Valentino and Don Michele were already seated at table. He bowed obsequiously, and at the former's summons hobbled to a third chair.

"What is the matter, Pulcio," asked Cesare, "you look solemn as a funeral?"

"If," answered the dwarf, with a wry face, "I who am a jester look like a funeral, it is because I sometimes joke in a grave way."

Poor Pulcio! Borgia's invitation had occasioned him scant pleasure. To be called to such a tête-à-tête was not in the course of ordinary events—to Pulcio it had never happened before. The messenger's face was no sooner turned than he thrust a small poniard under his doublet, deriving as he did so exquisite satisfaction from the thought that a scratch from that particular blade was cureless.

In passing through the long corridor he encountered the Spanish adventurer Brazos. The dwarf shuffled to him with his halting limp, took him by the hand, and said, "Copadre, a word. You have been forbearing with me when all others were cruel, and my heart, which is not so poor or so

deformed a thing as my body, is grateful. I thank you. Addio—farewell."

"But wherefore addio? good friend with the small body and the great heart," asked Brazos.

"Bend down that I may whisper," answered the dwarf, glancing cautiously around; "Borgia has called me to chocolate—you know what that means," he added, with lips whitening and with a slight moistening of the eyes.

Brazos' face became overcast. "Bah!" he exclaimed, "it cannot be; why should he seek to destroy an insignificant little jester?"

"That know I," muttered the fool; "but tush, I must begone."

The dwarf's strained nerves relaxed considerably when he saw his hosts partaking freely of what was served to him. Neither Borgia nor Don Michele noticed the sudden light that flashed in his eyes, or the faint color that rose to his withered old cheeks at the mention of the name of Vallon d'Avrées. And so we leave them together, Don Michele talking of the mysterious stranger with a French name, the hunchback listening intently with pursed-up mouth, and Cesare dividing his attention between what was said and the cipher letter which he had drawn from his pocket.

Later in the day, the Venetian ambassador was received by the Pope in one of the audience cham-

bers of the Vatican. After the customary salutations, the Venetian said: "Your Holiness, I ask leave first to discharge a duty just intrusted to me, and which is the more welcome since it gives this grateful opportunity to withdraw all that may have been said amiss by me on the subject of your new alliance with our neighbor of Ferrara, and to put myself in perfect accord with the joy of these present festivals. The Venetian Senate has till now opposed the marriage of Donna Lucretia with the young Alfonzo; that marriage is about to be consummated; our opposition has been unavailing, and so it ceases—ceases in good faith—and we offer to you and to the Duke Valentino, as to Ferrara, our loyal amity."

"I am indeed content to hear this," said the Pope. "One cannot have too many friends; and with Orsini and Colonna feuds in Rome, the Spaniards at Naples, the French at Milan, you on the sea, and the Turks in the distance, the patrimony of St. Peter seems cursed with unrest."

"The contests of the church are sanctified and prospered," answered Zorzi, "and through them she will attain universal spiritual dominion—as ancient Rome by frequent collision hardened her arm and her heart till both became iron, and then she conquered the world."

"And you," pursued the Pontiff with sarcastic inflection, his eyes resting upon the fox-expres-

sioned face of the Venetian—"you of San Marco conquer by commerce even to the remote realms of the known—verily a much-conquered universe."

"That is the mission of Venice," answered the envoy with satisfaction; "our flags float in every port, our merchants bring the learning of the Arabs from the Levant, and over the trackless seas of the north our argosies pursue the stars—but it is peace and prosperity, not arms, that we bear."

"The Lion of St. Mark grows fat upon it too," observed the Pontiff. "You have somewhere in Venice an emblem of a lion very robust and strong, which typifies the power of your republic on the sea—and the same lion grown thin and weak, denoting what would be the fate of Venice should maritime ascendency be exchanged for acquisitions on land. But I think of you as two lions—a stout one on the waves, a puny one on shore."

"That puny lion on the shore has been thought no mean antagonist by some who tried his mettle," answered Zorzi.

"Which brings us to where we stood yesterday," resumed the Pope. "You will no doubt continue to maintain that you can meet the forces of Louis single-handed—always supposing you were relieved from your war with the Turks."

"That we could encounter the army of the French King with even chances is certain; that we are likely to risk it, is improbable in the ex-

treme. I say certain, because by drafting from our ships we can put in line a veteran force superior in number to his, and equal in discipline if not quite in arms. Improbable I deem it, because our interest and our position, as well as this never-ending conflict with the Turk, incline us to delay—if others join with us we wait their coming; if we must stand alone, it shall be for our own sake, in the midst of our strongholds behind the Adige."

Alexander listened attentively, nodded as if approving the justice of this argument, but remarked abruptly, and with some acrimony, "Yet you will not deny that your thin lion has designs on Milan; Sforza—with what admiration do I recall him—is an outcast, and friendless—as are always the unfortunate; and were Lombardy torn from the clutch of the French, you would deem it a glorious addition to your lands—nay more, you well know you would unsheathe the sword of your patron, St. Theodore, against whoever but yourselves took a stride towards it."

"All that may be," answered the ambassador with a candor equal to the impending crisis in Italian politics, and therefore superior to the petty deceits of diplomacy; "but it is not to take from Louis that the republic proposes, but to prevent his taking from us; and from which of us is it to be—you, or we, or Florence, or Naples? So long as his army remains at Milan, it is a perpetual

menace; if it move to Naples, trouble will arise with Spain, for two such wolves cannot divide a carcass without rending one another. Then, the military position of Spain would be the better: an army numerically equal, holding Capua, Gaeta, and the forts of Naples, enjoying undisputed superiority on the sea, and with the disadvantage to the French of a long line of communication—perchance of retreat—through a country which yet burns with their outrages, and which, were they disabled by an unfortunate battle, would encircle them with fire. Then would be our opportunity, and in the repartition that would follow our success—if Milan fell to us—Florence would be defenceless against you."

So aptly had the far-seeing Venetian calculated the chances of the future, that whoever reads the history of the French in Italy, is aware that his forecast as to them was almost literally fulfilled. The Pope was thinking while he listened that the plan looked sound—certainly the advantages to be derived from its fortunate conclusion were brilliant as his desire; but his secret thought still pondered on the profits to be derived from Louis, before joining with that monarch's enemies—the use of his army against the malcontent Roman nobles, and the expediency of remaining in good relations with him while his troops—the élite and pride of France, and formidable as five times their number

to-day—made their way through the States of the Church to the Neapolitan frontier. And they talked on in the same strain for half an hour longer, enlarging the detail of their views, and each seeking to get a glimpse from the other's true stand-point, if perhaps that presented a wider survey or a keener analysis than his own.

The Belvedere Villa was a recently constructed appendage to the buildings of the Vatican, on the further side of a garden of the same name, and upon a spot now occupied by a modern addition to that enormous palace. It was furnished with balconies and shaded windows, which indicated its destination as a summer retreat. It was rarely opened in winter, and the supper served there one evening a week later was intended partly as a refuge from the bustle and crowd of the papal apartments, which for the last week had been filled with a caravansary of Ferrarese guests, and more especially that Alexander might have the society of his daughter on this her last evening in Rome. Only seven were to be present, and all were willing to escape to the seclusion of this adjacent cottage for an hour before entering upon the celebrations of the night, which were intended to be the most magnificent of the series in honor of the auspicious remating of Lucretia.

For the much-desired marriage had been ac-

complished. On the evening of the 30th of December, Don Ferrante led Lucretia to the throne-room of the Vatican, where waited Alexander, surrounded by all the pageantry of his brilliant court, and attended by his son and thirteen cardinals. She was dressed in crimson velvet, brocaded with gold and trimmed with white ermine; her sleeves fell to the ground, her long train was borne by her maids of honor; her fair hair was bound with a tissue of gold and silk; about her neck was a collar of pearls, to which were attached an emerald and a ruby. On the stair was gathered an orchestra and chorus, which filled the air with song as they passed. The nuptial discourse of the Bishop of Adria was so long that the Pope interrupted it. Seated at a table before him were Don Ferrante and Lucretia. The exhortations having been thus cut short, Ferrante, as proxy for his brother, addressed her the necessary question, and upon her affirmative answer, he placed upon her finger a ring, with the words—"Illustrious lady Lucretia, the illustrious Don Alfonzo sends you this wedding ring, and in his name I present it to you." To which she answered, "I accept it of my own free will." Thereupon were presented the bridal gift of jewels, chains, rings, precious stones magnificently mounted, and strings of pearls, which were Lucretia's favorite gem.

The Pope was the last to enter the room, wherein

a table had been laid, and which was lighted by oil lamps and warmed by two braziers of glowing coals. On this day, the 4th of January, 1502, at six in the evening, it was already dark, and the winter air without was damp and chill. Alexander, Cesare, Lucretia, and Giulia Farnèse were of the family; Elvira d'Este, Don Michele, and Cardinal Corneto, formerly secretary to the Pope, and now one of his most trusted advisers, had been asked as intimates with Pulcio, ex-officio, to relieve by their presence the sadness which began to gain upon Alexander as the hour for Lucretia's departure from Rome, and from his sight forever, drew near.

"How tired I shall be to-morrow," ejaculated Lucretia, "to dance all night, and to-morrow afternoon to begin this two weeks' journey."

"Leave your horse for a litter at the Ponte Molle,' suggested Giulia, "and have a good sleep on the way."

"So Vanozza said just now—poor dear mamma, how she cried! She gave me this ring—see, it contains a fragment of the true cross," and Lucretia pressed her lips devoutly upon it.

"There is a good deal of the true cross," observed, with a shake of the head, Cardinal Corneto, who in private was sceptical about such matters.

Elvira d'Este entered at this moment, and after a brief greeting from Lucretia, and a formal saluta-

tion from the Farnèse, the three lapsed into desultory chat upon the dresses to be worn, and the dances to be executed that night. "I am to dance with Cesare," said Lucretia; "nothing new, only the Espanola, but the Moresca that follows will be beautiful, all the dresses silver and crystal and white—and the enchanter sits on a lofty pedestal of lights and flowers, and throwing silken cords to the dancers, guides the measures with his wand. I saw the rehearsal this afternoon, and my head is full of it yet."

"Is it a real Moresca," asked Elvira, "or something of our own composition?"

"The maestro claims it as his own, an improvement on some barbaric dance of the Orient; but the Venetian Zorzi, who was looking on with me, said it was exactly the dance of the Moorish girls of Granada twenty years ago."

"There will be nothing to look at equal to your pearls," said Elvira; "when that box of jewels was opened, it was like sunlight on the water."

"Gems and the stars," muttered Pulcio, who had been listening silently—"love and immortality."

"Methinks, Pulcio," said Giulia, "you grow triste of late. Immortality for jesters will be a small place apart in purgatory, and the only gems for you are the bells on your cap."

"They will ring the changes on many an up and

down before I try conclusions with the next world," replied the dwarf, with a malicious grin. "A jester is the only favorite that improves with age."

Alexander's mistress turned away with visible annoyance. "How I wish we were at table," she exclaimed; "it will take me two hours to dress."

At this moment Alexander entered, the three young women gathered about him, and brought forward a chair, in which he seated himself with a sigh of satisfaction.

Cesare, on first entering the room, had motioned Don Michele to the recess of a window, and there producing the cipher letter, said in a low tone, "I have read it; the translation is on the back."

Don Michele took the paper, and read:

"FERME À VOUS, FIDÈLE À NOUS. D'AUBIGNY."

"Diavolo!" he exclaimed, "how did you read it?"

"Easily," replied the duke; "every alternate letter is a blank, that is, the alphabet backwards, there remain the letters of the message; from each letter count alternately three forward, and at the next three back. The great Julius used a combination similar to this. I was misled at first by assuming the letter to be in Latin."

"This d'Avrées must be a French spy," said Don Michele; "but what can be the intention of that singular message?"

"That," replied Cesare, "it will not take long to ascertain, when this mad Frenchman is in our hands."

At this moment half a dozen servants entered, bearing dishes of roasted pigeons, to which the company immediately applied themselves, while Pulcio withdrew to the alcove where Cesare and Don Michele had been standing. The Pope was ending something he had been saying to Lucretia, whom he loved with affectionate pride. "My dear daughter," he repeated, "when you arrive in your new home, ask me for whatever you desire, and you shall have it from me."

The fair Giulia placed herself opposite Lucretia, on the left hand of the Pontiff, Cesare seated himself beside Elvira, and with the two others filled the remaining half-circle of the table, which was spread with a pale yellow damask cover; before each guest was a porcelain plate, a silver drinking goblet, a curved knife, and a short, thick spoon—the frivolity of forks had not yet been substituted for the reality of fingers.

Cardinal Corneto began the venerable narrative of his dinner with the savages of the African coast when he was an explorer long ago in that region, and how—horror of horrors—what he had taken for pig had proved to be—— But it was a story that all present except Elvira had heard before, and she was in the midst of a talk with Cesare,

and the others bade the cardinal think of some more appetizing reminiscence.

"Do you have sports here on the Campania?" asked Elvira of Cesare.

"One can only venture on it armed and in good numbers," he answered. "There are foxes in plenty, boars in the grove by the sea, and birds for a falcon to follow; but the chase might end in a pursuit of the hunter."

"Last year," said she, "we hunted the stag in the mountains north of us; that is exciting enough."

"The finest sport at Rome," said Cesare, "is the bull-fight; I had the first here two years ago, with bulls and men from Spain—I killed two myself."

"Two bulls or two men?" asked Elvira; then, laughing at her own question, she continued, "the next time you ride outside the walls with horses and dogs, I wish you would take me with you; no doubt Giulia would go."

"You would dare after what I have said?" asked Valentino, looking at her with surprise.

"With you I would venture anywhere," answered Elvira simply.

The second course was now served, of venison, accompanied by flasks of Montepulciano.

A few minutes more passed in general talk upon the fête, for which all present were shortly to prepare, when from the street came the sound of

music, a rich, full voice, accompanied by the guitar of Castile.

It did not escape the watchful Cesare that Elvira at the first words started slightly; had the jester been under the same observation, it would have been seen that he too recognized the voice.

"A good baritone," exclaimed Alexander; "soft and rich as that of your Ferrarese brother-in-law," he added, addressing himself to his daughter; then, as if amused at the thought, he continued, "it would be a romantic conceit now for your husband's proxy to serenade you."

"Some one should answer him," exclaimed Lucretia; "Cesare, will you sing?"

"Not after supper, for the rhymes do not come when one has eaten; besides, we cannot open a window to this chilly weather."

"Pulcio is the only one," said Don Michele jokingly, "who, according to Valentino's opinion, is at this moment fit to reply."

"A good thought," said Alexander; "sing, fool, and speak thy fairest."

"Alas," replied the dwarf, "with me 'tis as usual in all things the opposite of what it should be; I can find neither tune nor poesy in an empty stomach."

"Drink this cup then," said the Pope, filling his own goblet to the brim.

The jester received it on bended knee, drained it slowly to the last, while Cesare, turning to the servants, said, "There are here two lutes; go, fetch the smallest of them."

"May I sing to the ladies?" asked the jester with a gallant obeisance.

"Sing to whom thou wilt," assented Alexander, "so thou be quick."

The three young women, Lucretia Borgia, Giulia Farnèse, and Elvira d'Este placed themselves on a canopy, the Pope seated himself at a little distance, and cast on the group a look of unequivocal admiration.

And now entered the dwarf, and at sight of him arose a ripple of laughter; the servants, maliciously interpreting Cesare's command for the smaller lute, had brought the larger, called an archiliuta, an immense instrument over five feet in length.

The jester, too, smiled at the grotesque disproportion as he adjusted the silken band of the unwieldy instrument across his narrow body; his fingers ran for a moment over the strings, while his eyes rested upon the radiant trio opposite, as if seeking there the inspiration of his theme; then, with a pensive gaze, and eyes fixed far away as though upon some spiritual prospect invisible to those who listened, he sang of mountain solitudes, with summits colored with dahlia tints of the set-

ting sun, where the mellow voice of shaded fountains charmed the nymphs back to their haunts of the golden age—till those who listened forgot the ill-shapen singer in the picture of his song.

"Prettily done," said Alexander; "though a failure as to the task proposed; however, I do not wonder the foreground put the gentle minstrel yonder out of your head. And now our litters must be in waiting, you my three sweet daughters must be in haste to prepare for the merry-making—but first will I give to each of you my blessing."

At this Cesare laughed, while the jealous Farnèse's face darkened; but his Holiness heeded nothing, saluting first the rosy Giulia, who bent to him her brow, then his Lucretia on the lips, and lastly the maiden of Este, while his mistress looked on with manifest displeasure.

"We shall meet in two hours," whispered Cesare to Elvira, "perhaps I may kiss the other cheek—who can say? By the way," he pursued, "you know our serenader of this evening."

Elvira had now reached the group of her attendants; "I!" she exclaimed, "how should I know him?"

"Because," answered Cesare, "you started and changed color."

"And you noticed that; then I will confess myself in a word: it is a condottiere officer with a

French name who pursued me at Ferrara—in truth, half the motive of my coming here was to——"

"And his name?" broke in Borgia impatiently.

"His name is Vallon d'Avrées."

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD LOVE AND THE NEW.

At noon on the following day, all Trastevere was in the streets and at the windows of those quarters through which should pass the nuptial cortège. The Pope, after a last adieu to his daughter, stationed himself at a casement of the Vatican whence he could behold Lucretia in the pomp and magnificence of surroundings which recalled the splendors of a triumphal procession of old. The humble Pulcio observed it from an aërie among lofty roofs. Del Nero, with half a dozen of his men, watched it from the crossing of a lane. Giulia Farnèse occupied a window of the Vatican with a few favorite ladies, from whose number her jealousy had excluded Elvira d'Este. At first, Giulia and Lucretia had been in uncertainty as to whether the Estense were setting her cap at the rose-cheeked, grizzly headed Pontiff, or at his blond, thoughtful son. That kiss last evening had determined their doubts, and one of Lucretia's words of parting had been, "If you do not wish to be shown the door, you must put that bold-faced girl outside it."

The Roman rabble waited through the passing hours, impatient, yet consciously rewarded at the end. The procession which should have moved at one, started at three, owing to the natural delay in getting together so numerous and varied an escort and marshalling them for a fifteen days' journey. First came two hundred men at arms, next the Ferrarese portion of the convoy, numbering three hundred; after them a so-called escort of honor, the gift of Cesare, amounting to three hundred more, in cavaliers, musicians, and clowns; the personal Court comprising one hundred and eighty individuals followed, and after them were the cardinals, the magistrates, the ambassadors, all attended by their respective suites—an escort to the Ponte Molle only. Lucretia, habited in a scarlet silk dress trimmed with ermine, and wearing a felt riding hat crested with plumes, rode a snow-white palfrey. At her right was the Ferrarese Prince, at her left her brother, who was to accompany her beyond the city wall. The train from Rome to Ferrara numbered a thousand souls, independently of the baggage attendants, who had pressed forward at an early hour, driving forty heavy wagons, and leading one hundred and fifty mules on which trousseau and personal effects were packed.

It was nearly sunset when this lengthy train crossed the Tiber, at which point Cesare, having saluted his sister, turned back to the Vatican, while

she and her followers addressed themselves to the serious part of the day's duty, the accomplishment of the sixteen miles which lay between them and their first resting-place of Castelnovo, no trifling promenade for such a motley assemblage, knights, soldiers, prelates, and ladies, sandwiched with cooks, dancers, musicians and buffoons, especially in the dusk of a winter's evening and over a Campania road. Gradually it filed into the narrow gorge through which the road leads to-day, there vanishing to the view of those who yet lingered.

At this twilight hour there arrived, by one of the gates at the opposite side of the city, the Countess Ginevra Savelli. Half a mile outside she had left her horse for a litter which with bearers and guards awaited her coming. When her husband was brought in wounded and raving, she had reflected that no act of hers could increase or diminish the severance between him and herself. How strange a chance had brought him to Boscobel at the hour of Borgia's visit she had learned, and Marietta had confessed how she had warned him of Valentino's coming. Her danger determined her removal to Rome.

She experienced now a restful, yet animating contentment at breathing once more the atmosphere of a thronging city, of being thus again in contact with humanity, after having so long lived face to face with the solemn silence of the Alban hills. At

a familiar corner sat an old man with iron tripod of roasted chestnuts, well remembered, for often had she passed him by; beyond, at his shop door, stood a baker deep in altercation with his customers; down an alley came the wine vender with his heavy terra cotta jars; before an osteria a group of pifferari piped their pastoral strains; a few women of the sturdy, low-browed contadina type hastened basket laden homeward; a patrol of men at arms passed down the main thoroughfare, while up a narrow street went a score of white-robed monks chanting and bearing to some death-bed the final consolations of the Church. At the palace every familiar object claimed her notice—room after room recalled occasions with which each was associated. Nothing seemed changed since the day her husband, in a fit of fury at some unknown serenaders, had spirited her away to the hiding-place of Boscobel. She was in the midst of this hasty survey, when the major-domo approached and said: "Contessa, a stranger asks to see you upon an affair of urgency; he said at sight of this you would grant him admittance," and he presented a letter which on opening she found to be a note dated that morning, addressed by her husband to Vallon d'Avrées. She knew d'Avrées only by having heard Savelli speak of him as an officer in Borgia's service who had become infatuated with Elvira d'Este. But for the impatience she felt for infor-

mation upon the startling events which had been transpiring around her, and a caprice to see the man who had accomplished the feat of rescuing her husband from the inexorable stronghold of the Church, d'Avrées would have been denied; but curiosity prevailed and she commanded him to be admitted. We shall meet him presently under another than the assumed name of Vallon d'Avrées. His appearance this evening was no longer that of his disguise at St. Angelo; he was wrapped in a stout cloak, wore a cap with a single hawk's feather, and carried the usual rapier at his side. He entered, cap in hand, bowed unceremoniously, seated himself, the door closed, they were alone.

She was the first to speak. "What is the object of this visit from a stranger?" she asked haughtily.

"There stands a bargain betwixt me and your husband," replied the other. "If at the risk of my life I saved him from St. Angelo, it was for my own advantage and in consideration of a pledge that he should persuade or coerce his cousin Elvira d'Este to become my wife."

"She has refused, then, that honor?"

"She has done worse than refuse it."

"My husband's aid is not now likely to advance you," said Ginevra, maliciously.

"No; but the time may come when he can help me to revenge, and that is sweeter than love—than the bitterness of love unrequited."

"You are a spy for the French; you are a watch-dog in the employ of Savelli; you ask him to coerce the girl who spurns you, or to avenge your wounded feelings—for shame."

"Not that," answered d'Avrées, with calmness; "I might harm Elvira in hot blood to save her from dishonor, but to meditate it beforehand, no matter to what abasement she has humbled me—never. It is not her I would strike, but——"

"But who then?" ejaculated Ginevra, as he paused with well-feigned emotion.

"Her seducer," replied d'Avrées, in a stifled voice.

"And has it come to that? Great heaven!"

"If not so now, it will be," answered the condottiere, as he buried his face in his hands.

"And who is the——?"

D'Avrées raised his head and replied: "The same who has ruined so many—Cesare Borgia."

"*What!*" cried Ginevra, starting to her feet, "how know you that? But it cannot be; you defame the name of a gentle prince—married to a sister of the French King—is he to run after a jade—a girl with no other suitor than an outcast adventurer?" and the magnificent Ginevra's utterance grew thick with sobs.

The condottiere saw that his shaft had struck home; a cunning smile flitted across his face as he reflected that here was a tool ten times more

efficient than Savelli. It had flashed upon him like an inspiration at sight of the count's note that the jealousy of Ginevra might sever Elvira from the contamination and the arts of her present surroundings.

The lady turned upon him in a paroxysm. "Prove it," she clamored; "prove it if you can."

"Ay," replied d'Avrées, appearing not to notice the sudden violence of her speech and manner, "proofs you shall have in plenty. Go to the Vatican; she lives there under the roof with him and his father—sangue di San Gennaro—with both of them. Every woman in the palace must know; you have but to ask."

Ginevra listened abstractedly; she had caught only half—to the Vatican—then her thought flew off to Giulia Farnèse, her old-time friend and companion, and what they might contrive together.

"I will go to the Vatican," she said, turning to d'Avrées; "you can follow my litter to see me safe as far as the piazza. Or, better still, come to-morrow and I will throw your slander back in your face."

"How you love him!" murmured d'Avrées, as with a curt salutation he withdrew.

An hour later Ginevra was seated beside the Farnèse in a boudoir of surpassing richness, though Paris in these present years might condemn a similar equipment as provincial.

After the compliments which their friendship and the separation of several months prompted, Ginevra disclosed her purpose. Ignoring her husband's and her own past excitements, she had heard with amazement, she began, that one of the maids of Ferrara was to remain at the Vatican. She had hastened expressly to caution Lucretia that a scandal at this moment, with the eyes of Italy upon them, would involve both Rome and Ferrara, and to urge that she be invited to return with the cortège to her home. And finding herself too late—learning that Lucretia had gone and that the imperilled Estense remained—she had come to Giulia with the same friendly warning.

All this was framed and draped and colored to give the improbable tale a savor of sincerity; but the astute Giulia was not to be deceived; she listened, suspected the general motive, and made the same reflection as d'Avrées, that here was a tool shaped ready to her hand. Her reply was intended to excite to the utmost those sentiments which a keen intuition had surmised. Her own conjecture rested upon the venerable Pontiff, partly because she knew his ways so well, partly because of Lucretia's alarming adieu, partly because no ground of suspicion could be discerned against his son. She reversed this in her answer and painted Elvira as hotly assailed by Cesare, and that no time should be lost in placing her beyond his reach.

Ginevra, never doubting, listened with gathering fury. And that man, she thought to herself, as the Farnèse filled in the details of her picture, would have had me believe myself the object of a first attachment—that even his wife is nothing to him. She restrained any disclosure of the flame which Giulia's words had stimulated, and remarked with studied indifference, "You, dear friend, will be able to devise means to guard against this shame. Merciful saints! what are these Borgias that they must be in chase of half a dozen women at a time?"

"Half a dozen," cried the other—"but stay, of course you do not know, you have been living out of the world and did not hear that five months ago, at Capua, after the assault, a couple of hundred ladies were taken in a tower where they had sought refuge, whereupon Cesare had them passed in review before him, and selected forty whom he sent here for his pastime."

But now it was Ginevra who became incredulous; the exaggeration—nay, the falsehood seemed so grossly apparent that she rejected it without effort. As well four hundred as forty. Moreover, she held, as we have seen, a grotesquely erroneous appreciation of the character of the man who had possessed the art to flatter her vanity and to lead her by that thread alone to the edge of a precipice; her attribution to him of only high purposes, pure motives,

and lofty devotion—was so sincere; her compassion for their mutual frailty, as a lamentable yet sublime passion, so self-deluding, that a coarse or vulgar charge upon her ideal fell to the ground of its own weight.

Ginevra prepared herself to leave, and in so doing repeated, "You, dear Giulia, will best know what measures should be taken—" hoping as she spoke the words to gain her companion's counsel and have the satisfaction of knowing what ingenious device was to be set afoot. Her wish was not disappointed, for the Farnèse intended nothing less than a consultation which should assign a share in the difficulties to Ginevra.

"There is no time for long meditation," she replied; "we must act immediately—something must be decided on to-night."

"Cannot you write Lucretia to call Elvira after her?"

"She is not strictly of the escort," objected Giulia; "she came as a volunteer, and only her family control her movements. We cannot explain our situation to her brothers," she added with a frank laugh.

"Then," said Ginevra, whom impatience spurred to what her companion evaded—"one of two alternatives, either she must be removed, and set free, safe and sound, at a distance from Rome, or else—" and she paused ominously.

"Or else she might fall ill?" said Giulia softly, reading the other's thought in her eyes.

"What better can you suggest?"

"It is not enough to say so and so might be done; how are either of these things to be brought about without delay, and above all without alarm?"

"If you wish something very safe and very easy," pursued the suggestive Ginevra, "speak to her duenna; she must have some one with her."

"Yes, but ill abed ever since the day she came; a winter's journey through the Apennines was too much for her years."

"Then you are brought back to my alternative. I have the man of all others to carry her off, with some assistance from us—but if the other course be necessary, then you must manage for yourself."

Giulia smiled at this timidity, but did not lean to any plan involving separation from one who might become an efficient and determined auxiliary. She affected to be struck at the instant with an idea which in fact had been in her thoughts ever since Lucretia's warning words. "Ormès," she exclaimed, as one who hits upon some bright solution. "No one consults him in vain; he knows me—not you—we will go together—it may not be amiss to be prepared with both conclusions."

"Well," answered Ginevra dubiously, "I am willing to go—and listen."

"Who is this man you speak of?"

"A discarded lover named d'Avrées; once in his hands she will need no duenna afterwards."

"I must see him," said Giulia, as her visitor rose to go; "suppose he follows as your escort to-morrow night; I will send word to Ormès that I am coming, and you can join me on the other side of the bridge, two hours after dark."

The gardens of the Vatican palace were laid out in the spaces which a later age converted almost wholly to courtyards. Towards the close of the fifteenth century additions had been made to the already vast pile of buildings, spread gridiron-like beside the incomplete basilica of St. Peter's, and the fancy of designers had been allowed free scope in the decoration of the squares and parallelograms which lay between successive wings and their connections. The last of them, extending inward from the Belvedere Villa and taking thence its name, was an enclosure upon which Alexander had lavished taste, wealth and leisure. A quadrangular walk occupied the sides; along the walls were trained rare tropical shrubs and plants; sweet-smelling box of great size had been transplanted thither; four fountains in the centre filled the quiet air with the soothing and melodious sound of falling water; quaint arbors concealed in miniature labyrinths were covered by groups of African palms blended with the foliage of the oak and

myrtle. Statues there were here and there, chosen from the hundreds unearthed wherever the digging of a builder or the more casual excavations induced by a reviving taste for the works of the ancients, opened a trench or displaced the rubbish of fallen walls. From the baths, from the Appian Way, from random burrowings they were gathered, green with the mouldy darkness of their long night—imprint yet with the realism, and the myths, and the habit of the nude of their pagan day. Half concealed by a grove of low spreading cacti was a small shelter roofed with glass, within which were stored the rarer flowers to be set out a few weeks later, and from whose open door exhaled a volume of perfume—the blended odors of a thousand buds. At the farther extremity a cascade fell over rocks amid ferns and plants where stood a water nymph beckoning in allurement to a faun who lingered—tempted, yet hesitant—on the bank.

In summer it was a fragrant retreat, bright with patchwork of flower-beds and with the crystal sparkling of fountains in the midst of its shaded walks and darkened arbors. Even at this winter season the genial sun of Italy—that mellows the gray of the rocks and softens the green of the cypress—filled it with a sense of pleasant warmth and brought the birds singing to its branches.

Through one of its alleys on the morning following Ginevra's visit to the Vatican, strolled Cesare

Borgia—abstracted, concentred in the ambitions which filled his heart and flitted through his brain, darkened as they sometimes were by the shades of inexorable memories. The marriage of Lucretia had been accomplished; the barrier of Ferrara was interposed against the designs of Venice; now the unwelcome aspirations of his lieutenants, all reckless as himself, however inferior in ability, demanded his first attention; after that, a further zone of cities to be seized—Camerino, Urbino, Sinigallia, Arezzo, Siena, and finally, when the time was ripe, a bold stroke upon Florence—the rich Medicean centre of arts, "the Athens of Italy," as her citizens delighted to call her. And ever and always to play so deft a game between King Louis and his French at Milan and Gonsalvo de Cordova with his Spaniards at Naples, as to draw succor from both, give nothing but promises to either, and finally stand by harmless and watch them rend one another in the conflict which he foresaw to be inevitable.

So mused he when a light step fell on his ear followed by the voice of Elvira d'Este, who, as she spied him through the foliage called out, "Good-morning to you, cousin Cesare. I have come to pluck some flowers in your garden—am I in the way?"

"What a bright, rosy face," answered Valentino, smiling in the young girl's sparkling brown eyes.

"Nay," replied she, "I thought you revolving affairs of state; have you nothing more serious to say?"

"Affairs of state!" he exclaimed; "this fresh hour is the sweetest of the day; why then cumber it with worldly thoughts?"

"You love it as I do," cried Elvira, with the exuberance of youth; "to me it is more delicious than music."

"The voice of nature is sweeter than song, is it not?" assented Cesare; then turning, he said, "but at this season you will find flowers under cover only; with your leave I will gather you a posy of my favorites, and see if they be not yours also."

"Let us go together," answered Elvira, as she led the way in.

The duke made his choice without hesitation; honeysuckles, a cluster of pansies, and a spray of green; Elvira fastened them in her bosom and said, "Now one white rose for my hair." But the adjustment of this last was attended with difficulty; she stood for a moment's endeavor with both arms raised, and the wide sleeves falling back from them, leaving their graceful contour bare to the elbow. "There," she said, "it is placed at last;" and dropping her arms from their statuesque pose, she nodded gayly to her companion and ran out into the garden.

"And now I will go," she said, archly; "for a bird tells me you have a tryst to keep."

"With whom?"

"With the lady who called on Giulia last evening; my maid told me of it this morning, and she got it from——"

"Good, good, but the lady's name?"

"The Countess Savelli, wife of him who escaped so wonderfully from St. Angelo;" then, without noticing the fixed attention with which her words were listened to, she continued, "they say she is the most beautiful woman in Rome—that many think so, that you think so most of all. Is it true?" she asked, looking up.

Cesare's face wore a listless expression as he answered, "She has been living in villegiatura somewhere away from Rome, and this is the first I know of her return—and is likely to be the last," he added with unconcern.

While Elvira spoke, his thoughts had reverted to the lost Ginevra with a delighted perception of the opportunity which chance threw in his way. He had acknowledged to himself on leaving Rocca Savallo that the woman had triumphed; he did not discern very clearly whence came his defeat, but even now, if Ginevra's jealousy could be aroused; if her vanity could be piqued through his pursuit of this girl, might not——

"So you are not going to see her?" asked the

Estense, unconsciously interrupting his meditations.

"No," answered Valentino, upon whom the thought grated, "my time is brief—you know I leave for the army to-morrow."

"Is it so?" murmured Elvira, with a look of disappointment.

"Yes, I have been away many weeks, and things will not prosper of themselves."

"That reminds me I have been away an hour from my duenna. So adieu. Pleasant reverie to you."

But Cesare restrained her. "You promised to tell me your story," he said, "tell it me now; and let me know, too, who is this Vallon d'Avrées you spoke of?"

"I will tell you all in a word then, for indeed I must be gone. I know but little of him, save that he is chief of a band of condottieri. A year ago at Ferrara he rode in a tourney; it was assigned to me to deliver the wreath to the victor—he, an unknown adventurer, without even a blazon on his shield, unhorsed two of our knights. He was led up to receive the laurel, gazed at me fixedly, and from that day has haunted me wherever I go. After six months he made an offer of marriage through my brother. 'What!' I exclaimed, 'you come as the herald of a nameless soldier.' He became embarrassed, stammered

something about obligations, promised never to speak of the man again, and left. But d'Avrées redoubled his efforts when once he knew me conscious of his thought, until one day he gained access to the garden where I was sitting, and overwhelmed me with the pleading of his—shall I call it love? I bade him be gone. He threatened vague mischiefs if I would not listen, upon which I dashed my glove in his face and told him if he crossed the threshold again my brother's lackeys should whip him out. A month ago he re-appeared at Ferrara; wherever I went he followed. My brother seemed possessed as by some spell; not a day passed but I beheld that detested face gazing from a house by the way, from some break in a hedge, from the turning of a street, until at length in despair and disgust I fled—this marriage of Lucretia was my pretext. I thought to escape my persecutor — what wonder if I changed color at the sound of his voice the other evening?"

Cesare listened with interest, yet with a half-amused expression. "He followed you in time," he observed, "to give evidence of extreme devotion to Savelli. At the risk of his own life he furnished him means of escape. What motive could induce this?"

"Savelli calls himself my cousin through somebody's marriage fifty years ago; d'Avrées mis-

judged his influence as a relative, but Savelli did speak to my brother—and the same day came to me; he never came again." Here the girl burst into a peal of laughter, and, lifting her merry eyes, she said, "I told him before presuming to counsel others upon marriage he should trim his—" and her last word was lost in a whisper.

"That was forcible," answered Valentino, dryly, and Elvira wondered that he did not relish more the humor of her repartee. Then he turned upon her, took both her hands, and said, "We have been friends for years; I am leaving for a long, perhaps a perilous absence; there is no one in this palace you can appeal to for advice or protection, and this madman is uncaught. I can conceive you safer than in Rome. It may be you will return to Ferrara, if so, you must needs pass near where I am, and we shall meet again," then, letting fall her hands, he pursued quickly, "you may be obliged to go in haste, an escort more trusty than the palace troopers may be required; if so, or if you need protection, or some service rendered, or whatever it may be, send this to an officer of mine, del Nero, at the end of the Vicolo dei Santi Martiri, speak to him with candor, and your wishes shall be executed." And so speaking, he slipped from the golden chain at his neck the whistle that has been noticed at Boscobel.

Speaker and listener were alike pre-occupied;

the branches obscured surrounding objects, and an occasional rustling through them and the steady trickling and splashing of the water would have veiled any slight sound from their attention. On the outer side of the garden wall lay planks, bricks and building débris left from recent repairs. Beside them lay a ladder, forgotten by the workmen, or left for some remaining use. Vallon d'Avrées gliding stealthily along the outer wall of the Vatican precincts, devoured by the thought of the degradation of his love, heard the pealing laughter of Elvira, and listening intently, distinguished the soft measured voice that replied. Not a word caught he, nor cared to hear; it was the work of an instant to poise the ladder against the wall, to reach the coping undiscovered; thence he saw them, Borgia holding the Estense's hands unresisting in his own, and in that moment of delirium that filled his veins at the sight, he snatched from beneath his cloak a small steel cross-bow of great power, drew back the cord, adjusted a slender iron bolt, and as Elvira bent her head over the toy dropped in her hand, pulled trigger—and the missile flew evenly between her and her companion. He had dropped before Cesare's eyes were upon him, but Elvira's quick glance recognized her pursuer. "Oh, Cesare," she cried, seizing the arm of Valentino, "save me from that man!" and she would have sunk to the ground had

not the duke caught her lightly and borne her among the trees and trellices beyond reach of a second shaft. Then he shouted lustily for the guard. Two officers and a score of men came running from the main buildings, three others sprang from the Belvedere. He addressed them abruptly, "A man on the wall yonder—has not had time to leave the street—bring him dead or alive." The soldiers scattered at the instant, and gaining various means of egress, left Cesare once more alone with Elvira, who was now sufficiently restored to rise from the seat where he had placed her. No word was spoken as he led her to the foot of the stairs that conducted to the suites of rooms above—then springing through the long corridors he snatched a sword from the guard-room and running at full speed from one chamber to another, came out upon the vicolo, glanced up and down its empty extent, surveyed for an instant the ladder whence the bolt had been discharged, and stood irresolute; the street was deserted by pursued and pursuers; there were half a dozen ways d'Avrées might have shaped his flight, and so Cesare walked briskly forward at random, supposing to meet presently some of his men-at-arms; but none appeared, and he saw only a boorish contadino driving his goats from milking, and a stall-keeper setting his wares in order for the day, neither of whom had seen the fugitive. He paused

at length, not sorry to find that his chance course had brought him to the abode of del Nero.

The house wore an exterior as peaceable as the walls of a convent. Cesare rapped on the iron-barred door with the pummel of his sword, for knocker there was none, and at an upper window a lattice was turned, then cautiously opened, and the watchman seeing the top of only one man's hat, leaned out and hallooed: "Chi cé?" and the face below being upturned, he immediately withdrew, hastened down the stair, passing a word to his chief as he went, and admitted the visitor with every mark of reverence.

"Quick, the padrone."

An obsequious indication was made to the stairs, down which del Nero hastened; through the guard-room, where four of his lambs had risen to their feet from a breakfast which smelled of bacon, Borgia was ushered into what the condottiere chief called the studio; this room was furnished after a purely practical ideal: a large table; a cabinet subdivided into drawers and shelves and pigeon holes, all stuffed with manuscript books and bundles of papers; a pen and ink map of the environs of Rome, on which was marked every house, lane, brooklet, and hillslope; a few arms of precision, and several common but comfortable chairs.

The condottiere placed one of these before his

employer, remained himself standing until twice bidden to be seated, and this little formality of etiquette disposed of, Cesare commenced a rapid conversation in which the transfer of the silver whistle and the necessity of making an end of this troublesome jack-in-the-box lover were the topics considered.

CHAPTER V.

ORMÈS.

TWILIGHT closed in gray and chill as the sun sank amid heavy clouds which soon after poured down a steady rainfall. Through the long unoccupied afternoon, Ginevra had watched for the coming of d'Avrées; and as the hour appointed for departure neared, and still he came not, in the midst of her reverie of expectant triumph and the mysterious apprehension with which her hopes were overcast, she felt troubled at the absence of so earnest a coadjutor. Thrice she looked long and eagerly from her window, impatient to discover his figure lurking under some covert—but in vain. At length a servant announced her litter; she descended the stair, and saw far down the street the muffled form of a man approaching; she watched intently, and observing that the figure halted on discovering the group of guards and bearers before her door, she stepped from their midst, indifferent to the beating rain, and waved a handkerchief. The stranger, reassured by this signal, advanced, and with a salute of recognition, strode to her side.

"Not a minute remains for explanations," she said, "I am already late; know only that I go with Giulia Farnèse to contrive measures for the rescue of —— her ——, and that it is your interest to come with me."

D'Avrées had passed no tranquil day since his adventure of the morning, and had almost forgotten his appointment, but when it recurred to him, he instantly bestirred himself in the hope that something might be communicated by Ginevra to occupy his anxiety. Accordingly, he followed through lane after lane, all unpaved and muddy, till they came in sight of the bridge of St. Angelo and of Giulia's train which stood disconsolately about her litter, their torches extinguished and the men wondering among themselves at this sortie of their luxurious mistress.

"I thought you were never coming," exclaimed the Farnèse, as Ginevra was carried within speaking distance, "and is *he* with you?"

"Yes; but we shall confer better at our destination;" and at her request the litter of Giulia moved on before.

Another ten minutes' trudge between lightless houses, whose doors and windows were for the most part close barred, even at that early hour, brought them to the wizard's abode, vaguely distinguishable by the glimmer of the three flickering lanterns their party still mustered.

The door opened before any summons was made; the ladies and d'Avrées entered, and were bidden by the gesture of two silent servants to a room brightly illumined behind its drawn curtains of Oriental tapestry, and within which the most welcome object at that moment was a brazier of live coals. One of the servants desired them to be seated, and pouring from a flagon at a side table, offered each a goblet of wine which the considerate magician had ordered to be in readiness for the invigoration of his visitors.

As the door closed upon them, Ginevra said, "Capitano d'Avrées, I present you to Madonna Farnèse; the motive of this visit cannot be fully communicated at this present—for want of time; but you understand that we are one in purpose to rescue a certain lady from a danger which threatens—"

"Threatens," muttered d'Avrées with an oath. —"and which can only be averted by our joint and earnest effort."

"I have often heard of you as an officer of distinguished merit," said Giulia, speaking the flattering falsehood with a smile so ingenuous that the disguised condottiere started at the thought that his incognito had been pierced, "but I never expected to hear your name so often as it has been spoken to-day; you have set the Vatican agog; we are all wondering for which one you meant that shaft—for Cesare, or—the woman!"

The entrance of the magician interrupted their discourse. He was a sedate, sad eyed, courteous mannered old man, of intellectual face, speaking with an accent savoring of the Orient, habited in plain black, with broad laced collar and ruffles at the wrists. He dissembled with admirable self-possession his surprise at finding a cavalier in company with the two ladies of whose visit he had been forewarned, and while he bids them welcome and leads them to an upper chamber, we will communicate to the reader some episodes of his career in Rome.

Landed on the coast of the Papal States from a Turkish ship of war eight years previously, he had presently established himself in the house he now occupied. He attracted little attention, living as he did in monkish seclusion. Two weeks after his arrival, he was received by his Holiness in private audience, upon transmission of a letter bearing the signature of Sultan Bajazet, and which related to a matter that had been the subject of correspondence between the Sultan and the Pope. Upon the death of Mahomet II., a conflict had arisen between his sons Bajazet, the elder, born before his father attained the throne, and Djem, born thereafter, who asserted Bajazet to be merely the offspring of a private individual. A sanguinary struggle ensued, from which Djem fled to the Knights of Rhodes, thence to France, and

finally to Rome. Here, instead of an honorable asylum, he found a prison—Bajazet paying forty thousand ducats annually to the Pope ostensibly as a pension to defray his brother's expenses, but given and received for his detention. After a few years, this confinement seemed not sufficient guaranty, and to have him put out of the way, the Sultan offered two hundred thousand ducats, a precious Christian relic, and the alliance of his arms. The approach of Charles VIII., among whose projects was an invasion of Turkey, taking Djem as a lieutenant to succeed the dethroned Bajazet, brought these negotiations to a climax. Bajazet's bribe became so large, and his entreaty to have this dangerous rival destroyed grew so appealing that the sympathetic heart of the Pontiff was melted. On the demand of King Charles, Prince Djem was indeed surrendered to him, but arrived at Capua a few days later, he suddenly sickened and died. It was Ormès who rendered this service by means of a preparation of arsenic, which, acting slowly upon the vital parts, made it possible to deliver the victim in outward health. He had been sent to Rome by the Turkish monarch for this task, should it prove possible to bring Alexander to a resolve, and this function discharged, he had been induced to linger; for the Pope was not slow to perceive that other occasions might arise for the employment of so skilled a hand, and

Cesare forsaking the compounders of coarse drugs, conferred upon him his entire favor. He was soon exchanging for large sums powders similar to that administered to the Turk—or an antidote to the three poisons most frequently in use—or framing for the credulous, predictions upon the future, with apparitions, and the dead brought back to a semblance of their living selves, and answering in the familiar accents of the flesh.

His latest service to the Pope had been rendered eighteen months previously, when Giacomo Caetani, whose family was to be spoiled of its possessions under guise of a sale to the Church, refused in his dungeon at St. Angelo either to sign consent to the confiscation of his estates, or to eat poisoned food. To avoid the tumult his open assassination might arouse, it became necessary to allow him food prepared by his own attendants pending the conclusion of a suit which was part of the drama. In this emergency, Alexander sent for Ormès; the magician removed alone to St. Angelo, and during the small hours took from the room of Caetani's sleeping servant a porcelain cup containing paste used in the process of his master's shaving; shortly after it was restored to its place, without change in appearance—but the next night Caetani was seized with convulsions and died in the arms of his attendant; the cup of shaving paste was missing from his scanty prison effects, but the disappearance of

so trifling an object attracted no comment. Only, among a few intimates at the Vatican, shaving soap became the theme of pungent jests.

Visited soon after by Alfonzo of Aragon (Lucretia's recently murdered husband), he had startled that Prince by his fearful incantations, the end of which was a frank prediction—*violent death.* To Lucretia he had assured many years' life and *an unknown grave.* For Giulia he had found only auspicious prognostications, which perhaps accounted for the ready facility with which she visited him. The sceptical Cesare had never conferred with him upon the future, having small faith in conjurers, however high might be his estimate of powdered arsenic.

He led the two ladies to an upper chamber, with which one of them was familiar; by tacit consent d'Avrées was left below until the delicate part of the conference had been disposed of. He acquiesced in this arrangement with contemptuous indifference; in consenting to accompany Ginevra he had anticipated the development of some daring enterprise, upon whose probable nature he had already been speculating: to be dropped from these practical considerations to the level of a conjurer's tricks, was a disenchantment so utter as to render him indifferent to whatever might be proposed.

The room in which Giulia and Ginevra found themselves was a large apartment with no preten-

sion to anything beyond the comfort an elderly man of sedentary habits would desire; manuscripts there were in abundance, astronomical globes and charts, a clock, still something of a rarity, a large fire-place in which glowed a heavy log, oil lamps in sufficient number to supply a cheerful light, several leather-covered chairs, and cabinets the doors of which were closed. Ginevra correctly inferred this to be the consulting room of the wizard, not the scene of his incantations.

He seated himself before them, and, turning to Giulia, said: "You wish to speak with me upon a matter of extreme importance—of life and death according to your letter. Is this lady equally interested?"

"Yes."

"And the cavalier below?"

"Has more at stake than we; it is in his interest we are here, though, to be brief, let us say our interest is equal."

"You are one and all in equal danger?"

"Not so," replied the Farnèse with some asperity; "danger there may be to one who has crossed us. We are here to study the fates, to seek guidance as to means and opportunities—and possibly the hearing of thus much may suggest that in which we are deficient." At the last words the old man glanced from one woman to the other, and each read in that look that he had understood.

He had indeed grown adept in reading thoughts, and callous to the vices and crimes with which every month brought him in contact. Not desire of money alone determined his co-operation with the *clièntele* which sought him. More potent motives were love of that power which the astute hold over the credulous, and an enjoyment in the skilful application of his circuitous methods—similar, somewhat, to the zest of a mathematician in the solution of a problem; or the satisfaction of an inventor in the exercise of his gifts. Occasionally some critical issue, some complicated situation was confided to his judgment, with rich results in prospect and knotty entanglements about the execution, and then it was that he labored patiently and with refinement of elaboration to group circumstances and determine time, and fix the opportunity, and secure concealment, till in his eyes his perfected scheme seemed an artistic masterpiece.

"If it be your pleasure," said Ormès, "now that I am informed of your wishes, we will pass to the laboratory, and you shall witness the experiments we will attempt together."

In the adjoining room was the paraphernalia regarded in that century as the machinery of those arts which whoso practised stood in certainty of hell fire, and in danger of the fires of the Church. Ormès, however, while regarded as in league with

the devil, was also under the protection of the Pope, and, consequently, on Earth, at least, lived unmolested. There was a furnace of peculiar construction, shelves filled with vials, several tables, a large basin on a tripod, a metal plate against the wall, a canvas adapted to receive colored reflections, an ebony cabinet, a pile of atlas-like books, and a mirror covered with a gauze veil, upon all of which the unsophisticated Ginevra gazed with trepidation; she made as though to cross herself; but, checked by the consciousness that the intention of the present errand was not one the powers above could be asked to bless, she abstained from the protecting symbol.

Ormès desired them to face the fire, which he replenished. Then having laid upon it the metal plate or shield which hung against the wall, he drew forward a chair for himself, turned smiling to Giulia and said:

"I will endeavor to show you with that an experiment that will be new; and now to what investigation shall we first proceed?"

"Ormès," said Giulia, "we wish for any hints your appliances can give, but you must already have divined that we need something else."

"I knew it the instant you entered the house; but there is an incompleteness in your thought which makes my perception less exact than ordinary. You must either tell me what is needed, or

resolve it definitely in your mind, when it will be unnecessary to speak."

"It is true my thoughts are not distinct; in substance we require that which will dispose whoever receives it to hasten from Rome: some distemper of the blood, a temporary congestion——"

"And a fatal termination?"

"No," hastily interposed Ginevra, who had not spoken till now.

"No," chimed in Giulia, committed by her companion's reply.

The wise man had expected a quite different answer: he resumed, "And how is time to be proportioned?"

"Immediate use," said Giulia, to whom this singular query was not unintelligible, "and effect within two days."

The magician consulted a large volume, produced a chemist's scale, took down several of the little bottles, weighed out a few grains from each, and delivered the mixture to Giulia, remarking in the matter-of-fact tone of a physician to his patient, "In a glass of wine—not water, for the color would show; not in a dish, for the entire mixture must be taken."

The Farnèse dropped the poison into a leather reticule at her belt. "And now," she said with a relieved expression, "to the experiments."

"May not we admit d'Avrées?" suggested Ginevra.

"That depends," observed Giulia, "upon what is to follow."

"I intend first to show you upon that canvas a fac-simile of the signature of the lady who has been in your thoughts; second, the water in this basin shall reflect a picture of her life past, and another of her life to come; lastly, on this plate that is heating, you shall see her face as it will appear after death."

"After death!" ejaculated Ginevra.

"Let him come, if that be all," said Giulia.

The magician touched a knob, and a servant appeared, whom his master addressed in a language unknown to his visitors; he then busied himself with the arrangement of sundry appliances, and, while thus engaged, d'Avrées entered, and without speaking, placed himself behind the ladies. The lamps were extinguished, leaving the room illumined by the red glow of the oven. The magician desired them to fix their eyes on the surface of the canvas. From the opposite wall now fell upon it a lurid light in the form of a disc, over which a moment later flitted the words in a hand none of of the startled trio had ever before seen—

Elvira d'Este di Ferrara.

The disc vanished; the magician relighted his oil lamps, saying in an explanatory tone to d'Avrées, "The person about whom I have been con-

sulted, but whose name, as these ladies will bear witness, has not been communicated to me."

D'Avrées looked puzzled for a moment, then he said: "However ingenious your juggleries, there is the same defect in all—that they lead to nothing. You prate of gold, and are necessitous; you sell the water of youth, and cannot stay your own decay; you know the future, yet are overtaken by unexpected misfortune."

The magician's placid face darkened as he listened to this discourteous speech; then with an assumption of urbanity he answered: "When I fail, it is owing to the weakness of human infirmity which sometimes overflows the sources of my strength. Those who live only for the sake of indulgence, know not that in self-conquest there is a power so vast as to be capable of arresting even the forces of Nature."

"You mean that you can defer the approach of death?"

"Only in one who practises the self-discipline that masters every passion and extinguishes the elements that draw us to earth."

"You yourself will not die?" interposed Ginevra.

"Not so," ambiguously answered Ormès, turning to her. "In the course of nature, the end of life proceeds from suspension of the vital principle: only in one in whom both mind and fibre of body

have been brought into subjection, can vitality be resuscitated. When I choose to die, my life will cease. By the effort of a will which self-abnegation has rendered perfect, I prevent the diminution of the sustaining element. And should an unsuspected accumulation of the dross of humanity threaten, I possess in *this* an element akin to life." And he took from the ebony cabinet and held before them a crystal, wherein a drop of water was distinguishable.

"In that moisture," he said, "is the primeval element of life. It is of the mist that ascended beneath the warmth of the sunshine of the day of creation, or of the dew that fell on the night that followed. It is free from the contamination of man, and death was unknown when it became enclosed in its little recess. Who shall say that it retains not, even after the lapse of ages, something of the essence of life!"

Ormès now drew the basin half filled with water to the centre of the room, poured into it a few drops of something resembling black oil, which at once spread in a mirror-like surface.

"Upon that," he remarked, "you will presently behold two scenes in the life of the woman whose name has been reflected."

He now turned once more to the big books, from which he read aloud some passages in an Oriental tongue, then lighted a few grains of

a chemical preparation which emitted an odor of bitter aloes; this, when the flame had subsided, he threw upon the oil, which, at the contact, was filled with iridescent coloring. The three visitors, who had risen to their feet to observe the better, gathered on the other side of the basin. But they looked and waited in vain. The conjurer exhausted all the selections which he found appropriate, the oil gradually lost the changing aspect it had acquired from the burning substance, and returned to its dull, murky tint, and the interest which had appeared on d'Avrées' countenance gave place to a contemptuous sneer. The magician abandoned his unsuccessful experiment without loss of equanimity, returned the basin to its place, and said—

"And now for our third trial."

By a small tongs he raised from the fire the metallic plate that had been lying upon it, whose surface presented the appearance of oxidized silver, with a deep glow of heat.

Upon it the conjurer could produce the picture of past or future events. For Alexander, he had recalled the waste of waters of the Deluge, a semblance of the streams of fire upon Gomorrah, the white, frightened face of Lot's wife, Thermopylæ's heroic despair, Alaric's armies thronging through the Alps, the toil of the Jews in their Babylonian captivity, the physical aspect of the new discovered hemisphere—the prairie, the everglade, the

mountain yet unscaled—all these had been reflected on that magic shield.

He now poured upon it a spoonful of liquid which spread simmering and became quickly dissipated in light vapor, and next requested d'Avrées to extinguish the lamps; this done, he busied himself in scattering upon the plate some grains that looked like salt, and which the heated metal instantly consumed.

At the end of a few moments, the conjurer experienced what resembled an electric or magnetic shock; his frame quivered, his lips ceased to repeat the muttered incantations, his hand firmly clenched the tongs by which he raised the metal aloft, now made brighter by the drugs just consumed, and upon which appeared a white spot which enlarged till it filled the lower half of the plate.

What it represented, none could say; it might have been a sheet or a pile of linen, or a snow-drift. Both the women, and even d'Avrées felt an undefinable dread as above it shimmered forth the vague semblance of a woman's face, dim and inscrutable as a reflection seen on polished marble.

Slowly its contour became more determined, the pallor of the cheeks grew distinct, the disordered hair fell at one side, the eyes were closed in death—at the throat was a severing line, as though

the head they gazed on had been parted from its body.

"Elvira!" cried d'Avrées in a paroxysm of excitement.

At that word the charm which held them all spellbound was broken; the face faded into dimness.

Giulia gave an hysterical gasp of relief, Ginevra wiped the beads from her brow.

"You should not have spoken," said the wizard as the last trace of the apparition disappeared. "The face would have grown clear as a portrait in a moment more."

"How did you produce that horrible image?" asked d'Avrées.

"I produce nothing; were these mere tricks controlled by me, think you I should have failed a moment ago? They are forecasts which no human agency could bring about."

"I, for one, have had enough of them," cried Ginevra; "may I never again behold that face."

"You *will* behold it again though, and twice," replied the seer; "the last time at the hour of death."

On hearing this prophecy of uncomfortable import, Ginevra rose abruptly:

"It is late," she observed uneasily to Giulia, "and methinks our purpose is accomplished."

"Think you so?" ejaculated d'Avrées; "then our purposes in coming here were not the same."

Ormès tossed his plate back upon the stove, relighted two of the lamps and touched again the knob.

"I am fatigued to-night," he said, "and can do no more; you will pardon the weakness of an old man; but since this gentle cavalier is not content, I will ask for a look at the palm of his hand—he shall hear something more nearly satisfactory;" and taking the condottiere's hand in his, he scrutinized it attentively, and remarked with some asperity:

"Your true name is not that by which you are known here to-night."

The individual thus abruptly addressed listened with a look half of disdain, half of uneasy surprise. The magician continued—

"I see written here a name—yours, or that of the place where Fortune awaits you—a single word—F-E-R-M-O."

The condottiere at hearing this snatched his hand away, and with a curse and a menacing scowl, "Enough of this jesting," he cried; "I will be gone."

The servant appeared and they descended together accompanied by the magician to the lower hall, where the women wished him *felice notte*, and passed to their litters.

D'Avrées gave only a surly nod, at which the wizard smiled as the door closed behind his visit-

ors. He returned to his upper chambers, opened the windows of his laboratory to rid it of the fumes of his drugs, replaced the plate, emptied the basin, and poured out for himself a wineglassful of a clear, amber-colored liquid, which he occasionally dispensed as an elixir, and which is still taken as such under the name of Certosa or Chartreuse. He sipped it with unctuous satisfaction while musing aloud—

"What a lucky devil is Valentino; just in the nick of time to-day, or I should have given these women the potion they asked for—and then alas for this Elvira they all have their brains full of! How absurd in Oliverotto to imagine I would not know his face." And the wizard, pouring out another glassful, sat down for a moment's meditation.

This last subject of his reverie troubled himself no further about the ladies, but turning in the opposite direction from their way, passed instantly out of sight in the murky darkness.

"What an ill-mannered varlet," exclaimed Giulia.

"Confess, dear, that the evening has not been auspicious for him," interposed Ginevra laughing, and recovering her spirits in the open air despite the rain.

"It was his errand that brought us out in this storm—peste! the water has soaked through every-

thing; suppose you come home with me—we will have supper, and you shall sleep in the room adjoining mine. We must talk over our plans, and you can leave in the morning at whatever hour you please."

"Willingly," answered Ginevra, who in the excited state of her nerves had no great desire to return alone to the forsaken halls of the Savelli palace.

The condottiere threaded his way through a maze of narrow streets till he found himself by the waterside, a few hundred yards from the bridge of St. Angelo, upon which, needless to say, he dared not show himself.

A boatman crouched half asleep in the shadow, whom he roused with an unceremonious kick, then feeling his way into the skiff which was drawn to shore, they pushed swifty across the turbid current and gained the opposite bank. Here he whispered an order to his attendant, and then sprang to land, and, cautiously making a detour, came finally to a house the door of which he opened with a key he took from his pocket. Drawing a wax taper out of the same receptacle, he lighted it, and, with this glimmer to guide his steps, proceeded to climb the stair, flight after flight, till finally he reached a garret on a level with the roof.

Here he was not unexpected, for the door im-

mediately opened, revealing the form and features of the dwarf Pulcio, who bowed him ceremoniously in, addressing him with obsequious words as Signor Oliverotto. The latter cut short his phrases.

"Supper, master fool, and quickly—I must be gone to-night. Serve me bread and meat and a flask to drink, and let us talk the while—I have a weighty matter to trust to that big head which has never failed me yet, and great haste presses."

Five minutes later a plate of cold mutton, a loaf of coarse bread and a terra-cotta jug of *vino nero* were placed on a table at which he seated himself.

"I have been discovered," he began sullenly. "I can venture nothing more. My men will be on the alert presently—an hour hence we shall mount together and make our way towards the Apennines. When I am gone, Pulcio, give a message to Giulia Farnèse, but for life's sake breathe not my name; speak of me as Vallon d'Avrées, she knows me as such only."

He interrupted his discourse to apply himself to the viands with the appetite of vigorous manhood half-famished, and continued—

"Tell her I am called far hence by duty and am banished from Rome by a danger she understands. Say that for the present I can be of no service, but urge her to remove the lady of Este from the Vatican. But hearken: I know not to what malice or violence she may go, and therefore I charge you,

Pulcio, as you value my favor, or as your hate of Borgia is still quick—look to it that no ill comes to the girl."

The dwarf assented in silence; Oliverotto quaffed deeply from the jug, and gathering his cloak and his rapier in one arm and taking his lighted wax taper, nodded *addio* to his humble friend and felt his way down the winding stairs till the listening dwarf heard his steps grow fainter, fainter, and finally cease.

CHAPTER VI.

URBINO.

FOLLOWED by an escort of two hundred horse, Cesare had passed the defiles of the Umbrian Apennines, and approached the town of Fossombrone, whither he had summoned two of his lieutenants with the forces at their command. He had ridden nine hours daily in the midst of his clattering cavalcade, over steep and narrow mountain roads. By night they halted at some convenient town—none durst refuse the formidable Valentino—where his men made shift as best they might, the townspeople thinking themselves fortunate if nothing worse than equivocal thanks were the return for food and shelter.

Riding at Borgia's side by day and sharing his frugal refreshment at twilight, was Don Michele, and often they talked together in Spanish, uncomprehended by their followers, beguiling thus with the thoughts and interests that preoccupied them, the tedium of the long hours.

The situation in Romagna, and the last campaign in the Marches, which were mainly the

subjects of their desultory talk, deserve some retrospective notice.

In November, 1499, Borgia, with a ravenous army composed of French, commanded by Ives d'Allégre, of Swiss under Baron Herbsch, and of Italian mercenaries led by the veterans Vitellozzo Vitelli, Pagolo Orsini, the Duke of Gravina, and Oliverotto da Fermo, had appeared from Milan on the northern horizon of the triangle between the Primaro, the Apennines, and the Adriatic; the eight or nine principalities occupying this space were unequal to successful resistance, even had not the feuds of years prevented mutual support. A declaration of hostilities was no more awaited than is a bugle note of warning looked for from the midnight robber. The lords of Rimini and Pesaro fled; the garrison of Forlì surrendered after an heroic defence by Caterina Sforza; Faenza fell after five months' siege, and Imola yielded without a blow. Valentino wisely halted to cement these conquests.

He had been forbidden by Louis XII. of France to conquer Bologna, whose confines he had approached. He, however, exacted tribute and a couple of outlying castles from Bentivoglio, to whom in return he betrayed his negotiations with the Marescotti family, the staunch supporters of their prince. Bentivoglio caused the gates of Bologna to be closed, and butchered Agamemnon

Marescotti and thirty-four of his sons, daughters, brothers, and other relatives.

Meanwhile Ramiro d'Orco, a man of merciless traits, was made governor of Romagna with unlimited authority, and with instructions to suppress the brigandage of a swarm of freebooters who under the weak-handed princelings had plundered unresisted, and to establish in each town a potestà for a semblance of equity in place of reprisals. The towns received prescribed administration which, however crude, was an improvement upon the vagaries of seigneurial authority. Life and property began to be safe, and the population turned to Borgia with a wondering admiration unusual in the sentiments of the ruled of that day.

In the substitution of one petty tyrant for another during the middle ages, one general consequence was assured to the people—that their condition would be nowise bettered. One prince might have vices that another escaped; if one plundered his subjects, the warlike ardors of the next brought siege and famine. The redeeming feature of the minor Italian despots is their encouragement of the arts and of such learning as existed outside the Church. All were ready to reward poets, painters, musicians, architects, through whose creations some veiling of oblivion might be cast over the sanguinary footsteps that often had led to power.

Borgia had conceived the wider aspiration of a state similar to that of the Sforza in Lombardy, of the Medici in Tuscany—a dukedom, not a fief; and while maturing the military and physical details of his undertaking, he had made ready that best apology of an usurper—a government commending itself to the governed.

The complications of Italian politics, the intricate web of many jealous states, the duplicity of all, the rich reward of success, the certainty of extraordinary chances where all was fluctuating, made the arena upon which Valentino had entered one of vast possibilities.

Between French and Spanish invasions, Naples lay prostrate, and for an hour he had dreamed the possession of its crown. From the Vatican spread ramifications that covered half of Europe. In the north three republics—Venice, Milan, Florence—had balanced one another for two centuries; to-day the power of St. Marc was drained by interminable conflicts with the Turk, following wars which had ruined the rival republic of Genoa. At Milan, Ludovico Sforza had, with the hand of a master genius, doubled the power and possessions of his predecessors, but his stately structure had fallen before the French invasion. At Florence the successors of the unwarlike Medici were absorbed by the agitations of internal feuds.

In the reorganization of his forces, Cesare re-

turned to his father the Swiss mercenaries. He placed his Spanish relative Candale in command of a camp at Imola, where commenced the assembling of *lances brisées*, as were called itinerant knights with a dozen men at arms behind them. The French under their accomplished commander, Ives d'Allégre, he dismissed.

The Italian condottieri under Vitellozzo, Gravina, Orsini and Oliverotto, were cantoned in momentary inactivity, and it was during this absence of occupation that their chiefs had sought to realize their furtive purposes, each aiming at the acquisition of a scrap of territory round some village, a title in prospective, gold, and the smiles of fair women. Vitellozzo, from his tenure at Città di Castello, meditated a swoop upon the Tuscan border. Oliverotto, bivouacked with his men at Fossombrone, cast envious glances at Fermo, where his uncle ruled—his uncle who had reared him in youth and had sent him forth in manhood with wealth and training. The Orsini brothers were ever busy upon the advancement of their family, then as for centuries at permanent strife with the Colonna, and in occasional difference or in desultory service with the reigning Pope.

At the head of their weather-stained escort, Cesare and Don Michele emerged from the defile of

Acqualagna and rode downward into the plain. Some miles to the front could be discerned their destination; to the left at a greater distance lay Urbino; here and there a house dotted the fields, but on approaching these habitations of more peaceful years, it was usually found that their occupants had abandoned such defenceless abodes.

"There is smoke rising from that chimney yonder," observed Cesare, "yet it seems much this side of Fossombrone."

"It is an inn outside the town—one at which we might fare well to-night," answered Michelotto.

"You have had enough of our mountain fare?"

"In truth yes; likely we shall find Vitellozzo thereabouts—the montepulciano is excellent."

The signal to trot was given and the long calvacade, gladdened by the sight of their halting place, started briskly forward.

Don Michele was right in surmising that Vitellozzo would be found near the fountain of good wine. At an earlier hour in the afternoon he and Oliverotto, in whom the reader may presently recognize the assumed Vallon d'Avrées, had ridden from the bivouac of their respective regiments to dine at the trattoria *Abbiategrasso*, where they had invited to meet them their colleagues Ramiro d'Orco and Candale. A messenger had brought word that the duke would arrive towards twilight,

and his chief lieutenants might thus be conveniently placed to meet him before the city posts, at the same time that their waiting need not be wholly vain.

The host, a portly, red-faced, good-humored looking man, received them at the door, while some stable boys ran out to take their horses.

"Keep that beast out of the air," ordered the burly Vitellozzo, "and mind the range of his heels; he broke a man's leg yesterday."

"Good Tomaso," began his companion, tapping the tavern-keeper on the shoulder, "Vitellozzo is starved with the short commons of the town, and I am jaded and famished after three days in the saddle: we are come to have one of the old-fashioned dinners, and two others will be here anon, one is Candale — he that will not eat onions and wants his meat well cooked — you remember?"

"He is already here, and Master Ramiro d'Orco with him. But prithee, signor, if you would have the old-fashioned dinners, you must give me back the old-fashioned days. I cannot keep a cow or a pig or a chicken for the marauders, and this very morning a couple of officers of your corps eat out my larder, drank two cans o' wine each, and went off without leaving me a florin: they had but a trifle of silver, they said, and that appetite waits not for arrears of pay."

"Never fear," interposed Vitellozzo, "I will make good their score. Ah, Ramiro!" he exclaimed, as a familiar form appeared; and they all entered the dingy eating-room from which the kitchen opened. The walls were wainscoted to the height of the shoulder, and on the spaces above were grouped trophies of the chase. Near the door were ranged mugs, goblets and runlets of wine, and rows of the wicker-covered glass fiaschi which were set before the guests. Four tables and some wooden chairs occupied the centre, and from the raftered ceiling depended oil lamps, which a sandy-headed youth had just lighted; for already, though barely three hours past the meridian, that sombre little room with its dark walls and narrow, diamond-paned windows, grew murky.

Ramiro d'Orco was Governor-General of Cesare Borgia's newly acquired Duchy of Romagna. Of robust frame, his physique betrayed but slight evidence of those fatigues and hardships of arms which had been the habit of his life for twenty years. Only a tinge of gray through the close-cropped hair, and now and then the listless look of one who has grown weary with watching, and with the alerts and surprises of campaigning, gave token that the prime had passed. His dress was a peaked cap, a tunic of blue serge, stout riding breeches, and undressed leather boots.

At one of the tables sat a pale, thoughtful-faced

man, who had laid his helmet and sword before him, and who now rose to greet his comrades. He shook Vitellozzo and Oliverotto by the hand, and in a discouraged way remarked:

"He has no fish."

"No fish," said Vitellozzo, in a humorously sympathetic tone; "that is sad, but I fear there is worse to be told: it appears the larder is empty—did I so understand you?" he asked, turning to the waiting padrone.

Before the latter could utter the lie his lips were framing, Ramiro interrupted,

"Empty, then why a slow fire in the kitchen?"

"My masters," answered the innkeeper, "there is a broth of herbs simmering, which with crusts of bread will be the first meal of my household since last night's supper."

"Your broth of herbs gives out a smell of meat," rejoined Ramiro.

"Meat!" ejaculated Oliverotto; "if thou hast meat and refuse it to us——"

"My noble patrons," broke in the host, yielding to the pressure of men who however stolidly good-natured at one moment, might, if angered, think it sport to slit his ears the next, "I have too long the habit of truth to speak a falsehood glibly, and my heart bids me give you my best. But the little that remains has been ordered for the Duke of Romagna, who is even now on his way here, and

who a courier said would likely sup at Abbiategrasso."

"I care not," answered Vitellozzo, "if two dukes are coming; say what thou hast and serve quickly."

"I can give you," stammered Tomaso, "the beef broth of the house, after that cabobs, and cheese and wine as you will."

"Son of a Jew, why didst not thou say so at once."

"After my experience this morning——"

"Dull knave, thou shouldst have known us better. But haste, bestir thyself, lose not a minute, and while we wait, serve wine;—diavolo! to think it need so much talking to order a meal. It should be good after such lengthy discourse."

"No," objected Candale, "more words, poorer fare. The best dinners I ever had were at a convent in Madrid, where I went on Sundays; the cook was deaf, and the Superior dumb—Madre Dolorosa! what a podrida they made."

"Come, let us be seated," said Vitellozzo, unbuckling his belt with a fat man's gasp of relief. "Ramiro, you look hungry, and you, Candale, seem out of sorts. Let us drink, my friends," he added, as wine, and a dish covered with sausage, salt fish, and olives—the modern antepasto—were set before them. "Let us drink—stay—what was that toast of Gravina's?"

"I remember it," interposed Candale:

"'Drink to the present, oh my lips!
Drink to my love, oh my heart!
Drink to the future, oh my soul!'

"A man is not thirsty when he has so much to say with a glass in his hand," remarked Oliverotto, as he drained the big mug which he had selected from the vessels beside the door.

"On the contrary," rejoined Ramiro, "he must have a bucket the size of that cup of thine to pledge to so many things at once. The present, my love, and the future—what is there beside?"

"Leisure to stretch one's legs when weary, and a fire to toast one's feet after galloping day and night in the wet and losing one's way in these trackless Apennines," answered Oliverotto.

"You talk as connoisseurs," observed Vitellozzo, refilling his goblet. "You, Ramiro, have been in the mountains; you might have quenched your thirst there—I have heard the Barolo is so exquisite among the Tuscan hills it will drown all the cobwebs out of one's memory."

"So will any wine if you take enough."

"No," again demurred Candale, "I am often triste over a bottle."

"That is because your chronic melancholy sours the wine to weak vinegar."

"What have you been doing in the mountains?" asked Oliverotto, filling his mouth with sausage.

"There were some men in the woods who dodged the patrol, and word being brought of their whereabouts, I took a troop of Gravina's horse and came upon them."

"Half starved," interrupted Vitellozzo.

"Not so starved as I am now; the rogues had a shelter against a rock, covered in with trees, a fire to hang a kettle on, a couple of tuns of wine and a score of pigs and sheep in a pen near by."

"You roasted them out?"

"We expected to surprise them, but they got the alarm, and some held a defile long enough for the rest to slip off, and though we followed, it was only to exchange shots."

Tomaso and his tow-headed assistant now set before each guest a bowl of broth scalding hot, with floating scraps of carrots, potatoes and pomadori. As Oliverotto remarked, nothing artistic, but it went to the right place. The cabobs that followed are remembered by every howadji as bits of roasted mutton on a wooden skewer, with alternate slips of onions. They were first introduced in Europe by Crusaders returning from the siege of Askalon, where perhaps the knights learned to cook them in the course of dalliances which were a subject of contemporary reproach.

"I hear you feasted mightily at Urbino the other day when the Ferrarese passed through," remarked Oliverotto to Ramiro, "and that to divert

the ladies, Guidobaldo opened some old tombs in search of Etruscan treasure; found you aught better than pea-green jewels of bronze?"

"Nay, 'twas but one tomb opened the morning the cortège left, though in faith it bore marks of having been broken into before. Jewels there were none—a terra cotta urn containing ashes, and beside it, fragments of Roman armor—and on a stone shelf a short thick trumpet with a twist to it. The only metal I have ever seen taken in good preservation from a columbarium."

"'Twas the sepulchre of a legionary bugler," remarked Vitellozzo.

"Doubtless," assented Ramiro, "and the instant Donna Lucretia spied it, she clapped her hands, and cried—a blast! Blow me a blast upon that ancient bugle and awake the echoes of a thousand years ago!"

"Ha! a droll conceit," laughed the triste Candale; "and could you produce a tuneful strain?"

"Not a sound, for the breath, so to speak, was out of its body, and one might as reasonably have looked to hear a dead bird sing."

In addition to cabobs, there were two other dishes in good repute at the osteria of Abbiategrasso, one of minced chicken rolled in cabbage leaves, the other of pigs' feet wrapped in sausage and overlaid with a white and yellow blanket of fried eggs. For the absence of these, Tomaso

excused himself, and as he placed a gorgonzola cheese before them with six more of wine, the convives were sufficiently solaced to forgive what could not be helped. Ramiro settled himself comfortably in his chair as one who has disposed of the weightier fatigues of dinner, and remarked with the pompousness attending the exhilaration of meat and wine,

"This gorgelet Don Ferrante gave me looked small enough when first I saw it, but after one has well eaten, it weighs heavier than unforgiven sin."

"What then would have been thy lot had he given thee a whole suit of mail?" asked Oliverotto.

"Or a rapier like this he gave me?" said Candale, drawing to him with evident pride a basket-handled weapon of fine workmanship.

"And did he give thee with it that cut on thy cheek?"

"That is the foolery of a French fencing-master Ives d'Allégre brought with him; he fell ill of fever, was sent back to us at Faenza, where I had him somewhat cared for. The fellow came to me a week ago and said I had saved his life, and that in return he would teach me a sword stroke which in emergency might guard mine; a great secret, he said—I believe the fellow was half delirious yet—and it proved a secret I failed to fathom, for with all his talk and crossing of swords, I could discover

nothing but a feint and legamento, and when his blade grazed my face, I went at the chattering rogue and gave him a thrust that has sent him back to bed again."

"D'Allégre will not thank you for that; he treats his maîtres d'armes like brothers."

"What has become of d'Allégre?" asked Oliverotto.

"Facing the Spaniards somewhere in the Abruzzi, while recovering from the effects of the oysters of Fusano. He said oysters were either very good or very bad; at Putzuoli he eat six dozen one morning, pronouncing them the finest in the world. He spent three days in his tent afterwards, and now he thinks all oysters bad—especially those of Fusano."

"Did he ever tell you of that queer notion he has on moonlight nights in winter when snow lies on the ground?"

"No; what is it?"

"He and I were in the trenches before Faenza—you remember how deep the snow lay. One night we walked together beyond our outposts to scan the walls. He remained at the red bastion we afterwards carried, while I moved cautiously along the counterscarp. It was starlight, but one could discern little. Suddenly the moon came through a rift in the clouds, and at that instant d'Allegre fired his musquetoon. I ran back and found him

spellbound looking into the ditch. He and a sentry on the wall had discovered each other and fired; the soldier's cross-bow shaft glanced from the steel corselet—d'Allégre's bullet crushed through his nose and brain, and he tumbled into the ditch and lay there on his back in the snow, with the moonlight full on his face, and the blood gurgling up with a gasping noise. I dragged d'Allégre away—it was time, for steps came hurrying along the rampart; the moon disappeared, all grew dark again, and we regained our lines."

"Nothing remarkable in that," observed Ramiro, as the narrator paused to drain his cup.

"But the curious thing," resumed Oliverotto, "is that every clear moonlight night since then, in winter, if snow lie on the ground, d'Allgére hears behind him the gasping and gurgling of that dying man."

"An unpleasant companionship," rejoined Ramiro, laughing; "such is the cost of killing men unshriven."

"Methinks," interposed Candale, "you will need a prettier story than that when Valentino asks where you have been this last fortnight, and what all these mysterious absences are for. Pedro de Castro came from your camp a week ago, and found that your officers knew neither your whereabouts, nor when you should return."

"I was in search of two valuable things," an-

swered Oliverotto without hesitation, "recruits and information; when Valentino teaches me to do without them, I will leave camp no more."

As he spoke, Tomaso announced a numerous company débouching from the hills.

"To horse, then," exclaimed Vitellozzo, in his haste almost forgetting to pay for their repast, a circumstance of which his attentive host softly reminded him.

The officers rode forward, followed by a troop which had waited near by. Cesare, at meeting, greeted them with a pleasant smile, shook hands familiarly with each, and said,

"Let us to some place where we can talk an hour undisturbed."

"Suppose we sup at Abbiategrasso; we can talk as well there as in one of your bivouacs and eat better," said Don Michele, addressing the condottieri.

"Alas," said Oliverotto, "we come thence, and both cellar and larder have been cleared."

A twinkle came in Vitellozzo's eye as he added, "Poor Tomaso told us he had only a pottage of herbs left for himself."

"For the first time I came thirsty from Abbiategrasso," said Ramiro, who in summer required half a barrel to cool, and in winter rather more to warm him.

"We will go to a house behind the potestà," said

Cesare, more intent on business than supper; "no matter that it be a Jew's."

Their stormy summons brought the terrified Israelite in view of the officers and their retinue thronging at his door. He was brushed aside with a mocking word, and while Cesare and his lieutenants seated themselves in an upper room, which gave token of the former affluence of its master, Don Michele ordered the house searched from cellar to attic for whatever provisions might be hidden.

"Vitellozzo," began Cesare, as he removed his weightier accoutrements, "I am stiff from the saddle; let us speak briefly; is your regiment all here?"

"Two thousand foot, five hundred horses, and four cannon."

"And yours, Oliverotto?"

"Ready in all but cannon. Candale took my six guns to Imola upon your order. That leaves me fifteen hundred horse and foot."

"Force abundant, and to remedy our deficiency in material, I intend to ask from the lord of Urbino the loan of his artillery train, which is said to be admirable, and for which he can have at present no use."

The officers glanced significantly at one another at the thought of so novel a mode of campaigning.

"You, Candale, will go to-morrow and make the request of him."

"And say he will be repaid for the favor," added Don Michele.

"And if the wolf object to take the fangs from his jaws?"

"Then use no more persuasion than to say we had supposed him a good neighbor. And now, Oliverotto, tell me why you are absent so much and so often."

"Signor Duca, I have no excuse to make for being my own master. Like you, I come and go as I please. I serve you—here at your command I stand; but I am above the sentry that beats twelve paces of turf." And so saying, he bowed slightly, and accompanied by Vitellozzo, who had listened to this declaration with half-concealed satisfaction, he left the room.

Valentino made no reply, and answered not the salutation. He cast after the speaker a long, steady, impassive look, and then turning about, busied himself through the ensuing hour with Candale and Ramiro, questioning them upon the new levies at Imola, the state of the towns, the schemes of the Orsini, the ambitions of the generals who had just departed, the supplies and munitions for the troops —and listened, while Don Michele, weary to exhaustion, dropped asleep.

Day broke radiantly above the broad stretch of green between the Adriatic and the Apennines as

Fossombrone awakened from its slumber. The sun touched the sombre winter foliage and flushed the mountain crags with rose and gold. The great gray cattle gazed with solemn eyes across their pastures; the crows flew straight to some far destination; the breeze swelled up from the sea and set the tree-tops rustling. Already the troops were astir with buckling on of harness and trumpet note and the roll of drums which Christendom had borrowed from the Turk.

Borgia inspected men, arms, accoutrements, ammunition, with minuteness, passing round each phalanx of pikemen, scanning the troopers and no less the steeds, the companies of cross-bowmen, the battalion of archers, the little squads that stood about Vitellozzo's four small, long-barrelled cannons, the flags and guidons that fluttered above the hard, weather-browned faces.

Guidobaldo of Urbino listened with alarm to Candale's message. He possessed twenty pieces of artillery, and these he was asked to lend to one whom no man trusted. True, there was no shadow between them; moreover, to refuse might be more dangerous than to consent.

"It was," said Candale in a blunt yet plausible way, "to aid a meditated stroke of rich promise; the cannons possessed by Valentino were inferior; a recompense should not fail." He returned to Fossombrone with the reluctant promise that

the guns should be delivered on the following day.

Before the next day's noon, Valentino's troops marched from Fossombrone, cavalry first, archers and cross-bowmen next, lastly the long files of pikemen, four by four. Cesare watched them defile as Candale approached.

"We have but one armorers' train," he said, as two heavy wagons passed, followed by smiths and mechanics; "in the Spanish service there is one for every thousand men. Set out at once for Imola—Ramiro will be off in three hours with an escort; you can go with him—take the first wagons you find, fit out three trains with men, forge and tools complete."

Cesare and Don Michele put their horses to a canter and gained the head of the column, now but a couple of miles from Urbino. The troops were ordered to move across the fields through copses which screened their approach. The city walls rose clear in view, gray and dun-colored, with towers and battlemented ramparts in picturesque grouping. The cavalry drew up behind Michelotto; an adjacent wood filled with archers, the pikemen were formed to the left out of sight.

It was past the hour for the delivery of the guns, and many a face among Valentino's officers peered watchfully at the closed gate; even Cesare toyed

impatiently with his reins. Vitellozzo and Oliverotto drew to his side, the latter reiterating,

"No guns will come; the duke has sent to Venice for rescue; meanwhile he will hold his walls—how he must have laughed at Candale."

As he spoke, a platoon of horsemen appeared at the gate, and after them, distinctly visible as they wheeled down an incline, came the cannon—twenty they counted, six small guns and fourteen lumbering pieces.

Cesare turned with a savagely exultant expression on his pale face.

"Michelotto," said he, "take the cavalry and close in behind when they enter yonder defile. Vitellozzo, place a line of men on this ridge; and you, Oliverotto, when you see the moment, dash in among them with your archers."

An interval of suspense ensued. Slowly the drivers advanced. There was but an officer's escort before them, but suddenly a column of cavalry trotted into view and circled round. They halted mechanically, stood gazing upon the trap which had closed, and their leader, who wore a white cloak, let it fall. At the same instant Vitellozzo's halberdiers appeared while Oliverotto and a cloud of archers sprang upon the guns.

Cesare advanced, caused them to be disarmed, and addressed himself to their officer.

"Capitano, you are at liberty upon the small

condition that you retrace your steps and announce to the duke that in one hour I cannonade the town."

The officer had dismounted to gather his cloak from the ground: he listened and asked,

"Will any terms be allowed the garrison?"

"Those who choose may enrol in my regiments at Imola; the rest disbanded."

The officer bowed, mounted his horse and galloped away.

"And now," said Valentino—"alert! You, Michele, surround the town with cavalry, take me the duke without fail. Vitellozzo and Oliverotto, divide these guns and advance to the walls."

The cavalry cantered off in two directions to close the gates of the city, and the infantry passed to the front, all merry over this humorous jest. Before forty minutes elapsed, a white flag was raised, and Vitellozzo received the custody of the gate before him. Cesare followed with Oliverotto and a column of halberdiers, and hastened amid the terror-stricken populace to the piazza, disarmed the garrison and occupied Guidobaldo's palace.

Sword in hand, from room to room hastened Cesare and Vitellozzo. The destruction of a deposed prince was an elementary axiom in Italian political science. A clattering of hoofs in the street diverted their attention, and springing to a window, they beheld Michelotto, a score of troopers and a prisoner—but not the duke.

The story was told in a word. The captive had attended the duke at the rampart where an excited debate had continued between Guidobaldo and his chiefs. The signal of the fallen white cloak undeceived him. Followed by a few officers, the panic-stricken Prince, abandoning every hope but that of life, had ridden out of the town. The speaker's horse had fallen in leaping a ditch, the girths had broken, and rising, he had seen the others galloping like madmen in the distance.

CHAPTER VII.

FORZA MAGGIORE.

PULCIO'S retreat on the tile tops looked over half Rome. From the graceful upper structure of St. Angelo, the eye reached to the waving greens of Monte Pincio, along the ridge of the Quirinal to the mammoth arches of Constantine's Basilica, to the cypress bluffs of Aventinus. A terrace skirted the roof, whence the glance fell upon narrow streets; almost black they looked at the bottom, so deep was their shade contrasted with the streaming sunlight.

The jester habitually returned at night to his rookery; sometimes there was a day's escape from serfdom. No one ever came to his refuge—neither tradesman, nor provision boy, nor visitor, however humble. The companions of his solitude were some pots of flowers ranged upon the balcony, and his chief pleasure was in caring for them.

"They were *hers*," he sometimes murmured to himself; "she placed them here, and I think of her through them—as it were between the blossoms."

One night he brought a theme for meditation. Giulia Farnèse had proceeded in her design against

Elvira with the caution and promptness of one accustomed to such combinations.

Having divined the dwarf's hatred of Valentino, she employed him with Catalina in the execution of her plan. She had secured the adventurer Brazos and two trusty fellows who undertook to remove Elvira at midnight to a distance from Rome. Lastly she had contrived the absence of the sentries for one hour. Pulcio lent himself immediately to her scheme, hoping to thwart any intended injury to the girl, and that after her seizure she should be delivered to his patron Oliverotto da Fermo, to whom he communicated the Farnèse's project, asking that a patrol of troopers be sent to meet the abductors.

For this task Brazos was well chosen. He had passed from ten years' service in the Spanish infantry, to more profitable independent employment, and now the fire of early manhood slackened, he had accepted the luxurious commission of captain of a company of arquebusiers. He served father and son impartially, and was useful on many an errand which Don Michele would not touch, or which might be too delicate for del Nero's summary methods. In appearance he presented the type of the Spanish officer; large figure, swarthy face, beard neatly trimmed, hair close cropped, hard black eyes—nothing peculiar about him except the missing half ear which a cutlass stroke had severed.

Three hours after dark on the evening of the day appointed, he had gone with his two bravos to the fork of three lanes where Pulcio had engaged to meet him, and where he found the dwarf pacing in the starlight; Brazos followed across courtyards and down one alley to another, till they came to the precincts of the Vatican.

"I know not," he remarked, "how much experience you may have had in such business as this, but in affairs requiring delicate dispatch everything hinges upon small details. The less they look the larger they develop at the critical juncture; you agree with me? We have but one danger in to-night's work, and that is from patrols between the Vatican and the Tiber; the Farnèse thinks it sufficient to put a couple of sentinels off duty. I did not contradict her—what use to argue with a woman? but the truth is the Vatican is watched by triple videttes ever since a desperate rogue fired a cross-bow at Valentino over the garden wall—you have not heard of it? Ah, so much for living on the roof tops. To resume, then, the chance of getting from the palace to the river without molestation, carrying a woman, is a chance not to be trifled with. So I persuaded Herbsch to give me to-night's password. Then Roccamura has pickets that go prowling about in the dark, and on the representation that I should be out on a mission for the court, he gave his countersign.

Lastly, there is a knave called del Nero, who may be run against at any hour; for him, if we meet, I have this," and with a laugh he produced a forged order, addressed to the condottiere, and enjoining assistance and protection to the bearer. "Best of all, I have watched and timed these various nighthawks, and with luck we can pass down the Vicolo del Giardino, which three men will observe, ready to give us timely warning. At the water's edge waits a boat; we all get into it and away a mile down the river to a hovel where will be horses, lights, and a bite and sup. It is understood that there I leave the woman to be carried wherever Giulia orders."

"Are you sure of overpowering a woman without noise?" asked Pulcio.

"Giulia's words were—wring her neck if she screams."

"And what is in that bundle?"

"A handkerchief to put in her mouth; a cloth to bind round to keep the muzzle in place, a linen bag to drop over her head, and a cord for the wrists. From the bedding we will take a blanket to wrap her in, and there will be a robe and a cloak in the boat."

A convivial party was that assembled in one of the dining chambers of the Vatican—Giulia Farnèse, Ginevra Savelli, Elvira d'Este, Donna Cata-

lina, and the Venetian Marino Zorzi. Not one of the gala rooms, but a cosey apartment for a quiet supper, in the absence of his Holiness, whom gout confined to his couch.

To oysters from Baiae had succeeded trout from Tivoli, two brace of pheasants from Albano, a young boar's head, which Elvira had never tasted and which she was afraid of now, and lastly an assortment of the sweets in which Giulia delighted, and for the better preparation of which she had recently imported a Parisian patissier. In an adjoining room, quite out of view, was the Farnèse's latest toy, a mandolin quartette, and ever and anon some sweet refrain trembled on the air.

Giulia was in a gale of good spirits, and Ginevra and Elvira caught something of her unusual gayety. Connoisseur as he was, the Venetian could not determine which was the loveliest of the three.

"You shall see them to-morrow," exclaimed Giulia; "six superb Arab horses, a service of filigreed silver, bright plumaged birds, and, sweetest of all, two little monkeys."

"The Sultan is a friend worth having," remarked Zorzi; "would that we in Venice had been mindful of it."

"What have you done with the monkeys?" asked Elvira.

"They are neighbors of yours for to-night, till a

place can be arranged to-morrow. They played and scampered about all the afternoon and fell asleep at dusk, curled up together with a blanket tucked over them."

"How amused Lucretia would have been."

"I shall write and tell her about them."

"Is it true a letter was received to-day from Ferrara?"

"Yes; Lucretia announces safe arrival and sweet welcome."

"Does she speak of Alfonzo?"

"Pronounces him handsome and charming, but in general terms. What fêtes they will have there now," continued Giulia; "how dull it seems after the brilliant galas of three weeks ago. You have often told me," she added, addressing Zorzi, "of the celebrations at Venice on the water; could not we arrange something of that sort here?"

"You have the Tiber," answered the envoy, "but forgive me, you have not the graceful gondolas, the gilded pleasure galleys, the argosies with pink and citron sails. Here none dare venture to church or festival unarmed; in Venice the days pass as though the gentle surf-beat on the Lido attuned the chords of life. Your eddying Tiber is not the placid Grand Canal, glistening in the sun by day beneath the marble carvings of a hundred palaces, and at night sparkling with lanterns and reverberent with voices of song."

"I leave for Ferrara in three days," said Elvira, "thence I will write you of the latest pageants in Venice; they may serve in suggestion."

Giulia exchanged a furtive glance with Donna Catalina, who had scarcely spoken, plunged as she seemed in abstraction. Neither of them put faith in this declaration of departure, and a strangely similar expression rested for a moment on both their faces, while it lasted making the youthful countenance of the Farnèse resemble that of her hard-featured confidante.

"That will be like you," she replied; "always thoughtful and kind."

"Suppose," said Ginevra, "we go on a visit to Lucretia, thence to Venice, and have our fête on the water as Messer Zorzi described it."

"He might take us thither by water," observed Giulia playfully.

"I will bring my own barge to Ancona," answered the envoy.

"To Ancona only; you must bring it to Rome."

"A chariot across the Apennines, and a galley on the sea." The Venetian's half spoken reply was drowned by the merriment of his companions.

"In recognition of his gallantry," said Giulia, "we will drink the health of our host that is to be. Not in ordinary wine—there is a flask from Spain yonder—what, have all the servants left? then, good Catalina, do me the service to place it

here—we will use those little glasses—'tis of an exquisite flavor, sent me by the King and made at his own vineyard at Oporto."

The amiable Donna Catalina rose and brought the desired flask and glasses; Giulia's hand trembled perceptibly as she filled them, returning the flask to Catalina who replaced it on the carving table. Each of the guests took one of the little glasses. In resuming her seat at the right of Elvira, Donna Catalina's long sleeve upset that before the Estense. "With all my heart I ask your pardon," she said; "fortunately it is not broken, there is no ill-luck; you forgive me? I will refill your glass——"

"And now," said Giulia, diverting attention to herself, "it is agreed we go to Venice, and Messer Zorzi shall be master of the fêtes and——"

"And here, fair Elvira, is your glass replenished," whispered Catalina.

"And in the meanwhile let us pledge him to the last drop; he shall drink to us when we float by the Rialto together."

They emptied their glasses. Giulia glanced again towards Catalina and noticed that her face from being pale had flushed crimson. At this instant Pulcio entered. He too seemed in a mood more jocular than even his usual wont, and made merry over the bumper that the Venetian handed him wherewith to toast the proposed journey.

Ginevra rose to go, and Giulia followed to the adjoining room.

"Some one travels far to-night," she said in a low voice.

"I saw that Catalina gave it," whispered the Savelli, half frightened, half glad.

"Yes; and more than that, all is arranged as I told you yesterday. She will be carried hence within two hours; you will never see her more—nor will I—hush, some one comes, it is Zorzi."

The Venetian joined them, and offered to Ginevra his hand down the broad stairs, at the foot of which, near the Swiss sentries, stood their servants.

Elvira rose as Giulia re-entered. "I too must leave," she said; "my poor Innocenta has suffered all day, and I promised to spend a moment with her."

"Afflicted lady, does she receive everything she needs?"

"Yes, sweet friend; warm weather alone will restore her, and it is for her sake I have waited till now, in the hope of less inclement skies."

"If you speak thus, you will make us pray for storms."

"Dear Giulia, I kiss you good-night; may your rest be untroubled."

"That yours will not be," thought the Farnèse, returning the salutation.

The next moment she was alone with the dwarf and Donna Catalina.

"Oh, Giulia," exclaimed the latter, unable to contain herself even in presence of the jester, "if you have deceived me—if it prove fatal——"

"Peace, croaking raven! what danger is there in a little night air?" interposed Giulia, seeking to apply the words of her accomplice to the attempt before them. But Pulcio was quick-witted, and a swift suspicion had fired his brain. Giulia resolved to remove him instantly from the conscience-stricken Catalina.

"Where are they?" she asked abruptly.

"Hidden at the head of the lane."

"Good. One hour before midnight the Torre gate sentries will be withdrawn. You will bring them in at that moment; hasten to the floor above this, and wait in the room at the angle till I summon. Go—be quick."

The dwarf left the room. Giulia wheeled upon Catalina with a frenzy intensified by her overwrought nerves.

"Imbecile!" she hissed, "would you ruin all! Two fools to serve me instead of one."

Catalina burst into tears and gasped herself to the verge of hysteria. "Stop—no noise," exclaimed Giulia, clutching her arm, then releasing it as she perceived that one of her factors was being frightened to uselessness. "There," she resumed, less

harshly, "if I spoke thus, it was but to check that moment's panic—here, drink we each a glass of this cordial to put us in heart—so, are you yourself again?"

"Oh, mistress, if only I felt sure there is no terrible mistake!"

"Why, thou prating jade, it is even as I said, a sleeping potion. How could we have removed her without it, or how can you suspect me of using anything more potent?"

Catalina sobbed herself to comparative steadiness. "Another glass of your cordial," she said, "and then we must be going; it is time—yet how slowly the minutes drag."

A moment later they were together in Giulia's room, each replaced her robes with a light wrap and noiseless slippers. Half an hour passed. They stole to a casement which commanded Elvira's window; the light in it was still burning: a little further was her duenna's apartment, and there, too, appeared a light.

"Innocenta is very ill; strange that her lamp is not extinguished."

"Sick people dread the dark."

"Her light and her wakefulness will not interfere with us; who cares if she does hear a scuffle."

"Besides there is a passage and two doors between their rooms; one of them, at least, will be closed."

Presently the bells of a dozen churches sounded the hour before midnight, and simultaneously the light in Elvira's room disappeared. "Darkness!" murmured Giulia, "how strange will the light seem to her when she next beholds it. Stay you here, Catalina, and watch, and I will meet the men. How my heart beats."

Fifteen minutes passed, and the jester, followed by Brazos and two rough hirelings, hastened up the stair. "The sentries were withdrawn," whispered Pulcio to Giulia, "but the guards in the palace are everywhere doubled."

"That is nothing; Herbsch feared the consequences, and so doubled the watch at every other post, like the dullard he is."

"We must be quick," said Brazos; "show us the way at once."

"Hush!" exclaimed Giulia, "some one comes."

Catalina hastened to them; "The light in the duenna's room is out; it is half an hour since Elvira's was extinguished"—then whispering in Giulia's ear, she said, "The potion must have taken effect; 'tis now an hour and a half."

"To it then! You, Pulcio, keep watch on the stairs, I will remain here, Catalina will open the door, and you, Brazos, and your men will do the rest."

The Spaniard listened absently, as if immersed in his own thoughts, or not caring what a woman

might say at such a moment: and now Catalina led the way, the men following softly, bearing the cords and bandages in their hands. They reached the door, which was in one particular of unusual construction, though there were others like it among the guest chambers. A hidden spring was pressed by Catalina, and she drew open one of the panels. Introducing her hand, she threw back the bolt and noiselessly opened the door. All within was silent, all was dark, save for the faint light from the hall behind, which barely made objects distinguishable. Giulia at the end of the corridor stood watching them; and now all four passed from her view.

Catalina pointed to the bed, where the outline of a figure was discernible. Brazos seized the arms of the sleeper, his attendants, ere a scream could pass the lips of the awakened woman, forced a handkerchief between her teeth, bound a strip of linen over it, and drew a muslin sack over her head, which fell back upon the pillow as if their victim had swooned in affright. It was the work of an instant to tie her hands, two blankets were wrapped about her, and the men raised her between them.

Giulia saw them come out and hurry past, bearing their inanimate and ominous burden—her eyes swam, her nerves relaxed after the long excitement, she tottered against the wall, as they passed

down the stairs, vanished from her sight, and were gone.

"Let us to your room," exclaimed Catalina in a muffled voice; "you faint—you will fall to the ground."

"Did they get out before the sentries returned?"

"Pulcio has followed to see."

"Did you close the spring at her door?"

"Yes, and shut the door when we came out."

In Giulia's room they waited. The bells sounded midnight, but the jester came not; finally Catalina stole out into the hall-way, and called down a small winding stair; two drowsy maids answered her summons.

"Wait no longer," she said, "put out the lamps; but first one of you look if the guards at the Torre gate are awake."

The woman returned with an affirmative answer, which Catalina bore to her mistress. "They would not let Pulcio in at this hour," she added.

"Probably they had resumed their posts before he got back," mused Giulia; "strange that he should have gone outside."

"Let us to our beds now," urged Catalina, taking up a small taper, "we are both exhausted, and it is idle wondering why this, why that."

"Yes, go you and sleep; I too will doze a little if I can; another such night as this would make me begin to look old."

"They are in the boat now," she thought; and the vision of that helpless, muffled figure came back to her. "The poison will take effect to-morrow," she muttered, "sufficient to make resistance unavailing." And the alarm in the morning—who would first make the startling discovery of Elvira's disappearance? Would it be the sick duenna, or more probably some maid come to arouse her? And by degrees the thoughts became less distinct, grew more and more spectral, till Giulia dropped into a fitful slumber, with an occasional start from visions of troops of stalwart men and grinning dwarfs gliding by in endless succession, and bearing corpse after corpse before her.

She was roused by a noise too positive to belong to the land of dreams; a blending of voices and foot-falls in the hall below. It was no longer dark; the gray of dawn spread all across the sky. A hurried step passed her door. She threw on the garments that lay nearest and looked out. No one appeared in the corridor; from a window she could scan the court-yard where two soldiers stood talking;—suddenly a woman came running up the stair.

"What is it?" cried Giulia, placing herself before the new-comer, whom she recognized to be the Estense's maid. But the woman answered not, and darting by, hurried on to Elvira's door—what! could she be mistaken! the servant had gone to the door beyond Elvira's—ah, yes, to sum-

mon the duenna, that was a matter of course; then came the sound of voices, she listened, she went nearer—a cold spasm struck her, she hastened to the room—and there before her stood Elvira d'Este.

Giulia Farnèse was dumbstruck with overwhelming disappointment. It seemed like magic—though Ormès could play no tricks like this—or like the protecting agency of some uncanny power. She remained speechless, and scarcely heard the first words spoken.

"Oh, Giulia!" cried Elvira, bewildered as one who is painfully awakened, and her eyes filled with tears, "what is it that has happened—what can Felicia mean?"

"Did you sleep in this room?" asked Giulia, not noticing the question.

"Yes; the next is mine, this is Innocenta's."

"Haste you, lady," interrupted the maid; "throw something on and come down, or she may die ere you see her."

"Why did you leave your own?" asked Giulia, absorbed by one thought.

Elvira threw on the gown her servant held. "Last evening," she began, "I found Innocenta in a paroxysm of alarm. Your monkeys had been placed in the room adjoining; she learned of it and fancied she heard their chatter. She said she would as leave have a monkey in her room as in

the room beside her, so—but what were you telling me, Felicia—she was found in the lane by a patrol of guards?"

"She can scarcely speak—they summoned me from my bed, I was only with her a moment, and ran back to call you."

There came the noise of measured steps in the corridor. Felicia peeped out and said: "They are bringing her now, here she is—this way, lay her on her own bed;" and slowly four guards entered, bearing a dishevelled and half-conscious woman wrapped in a blanket.

"Poor lady!" exclaimed Elvira, horror-struck, "what strange thing is this?" The men left the room; Giulia lingered and listened.

"Innocenta," continued Elvira, "what has befallen you?"

The old woman drew a long sigh of relief as she was laid tenderly on her bed. "Oh, Elvira!" she answered, speaking with difficulty, "what have I not suffered!"

"Tell us in a few words how you left my room—speak slowly, little by little."

The sick woman looked wearily around. "Little by little. Yes, I am so tired. Last night I was seized—it is all so vague, my head swam, my heart stood still; I felt myself carried into the night air; there seemed to be a number of men; some were talking, and one said: 'I know

it; not an instant is to be lost, or she will be dead before morning.'"

"What could that mean?" ejaculated Elvira, as Innocenta paused to take breath.

"The others answered: 'We cannot stop here; it is not safe; wait till we get to the boat.'"

"The boat!" cried Elvira, amazed.

"Soon after they stopped; I heard them trying to strike a light. 'Never mind your lantern,' said one; 'I have an emetic here; open her mouth and I will pour it down.' 'She will scream,' objected another. 'Nay,' insisted the first, 'do you not see that she is unconscious? The poison has taken effect already.' They began undoing the wraps about my head, and all the time I heard the striking of the flint and steel. My lips were glued together. I could not cry aloud. A bottle was forced into my mouth; its contents gurgled down my throat; at last the lantern was lighted; I saw the men before me, and foremost, holding the bottle, a hideous dwarf—oh, the ghastly distorted face!—and then one of the others uttered an oath, tore the covering from my face; they all began talking at once; their draught sickened me; I fainted, and——"

Innocenta ceased speaking; her voice had failed.

"A patrol discovered her an hour since," added the maid, Felicia, "rolling on the ground and raving."

A light dawned upon Elvira; she was slow in making the first discovery; she did not yet associate Giulia with what had happened, and turned to speak to her, but the Farnèse had heard enough and had slipped noiselessly from the room.

The attentions which Elvira and her maid bestowed upon the exhausted duenna were interrupted by the arrival of Giulia's physician. He was a man in advance of the medical science of his age. He pronounced bleeding unnecessary; that no strong drugs were required; that the poison—since they all talked of poison—had certainly been removed by the emetic; that he would leave two pellets to be taken—soothing, warming to the system. More than this, a light broth at intervals through the day. He stopped at Giulia's door to give news of the patient. She drew him into the room and bade him be seated, addressing him by the name of Ormès.

"Will she die?"

"She is in no danger; it is weakness; she has been roughly dealt with."

"Elvira received the drops last evening; when will they take effect?"

The magician appeared to reflect profoundly. "It depends upon many circumstances: the condition of her system; the state of the weather, and so on. But it should be either to-day or to-night."

"That is too late," said Giulia, half talking to herself. "An inquiry will be made; no story can cover so bad a case—I must have a short way out of this," she said, starting up.

Ormès knew that these words portended sure, swift, agonizing death to the unsuspecting Elvira. He sought for some pretext to look in again on his patient and warn the Estense. But this might be at the risk of his own life if Giulia learned of his return to the sick-room. He renounced the idea, therefore, with the Oriental reflection—"It is her fate!"

But rescue arrived from another and a surer source. Not long after the supposed leech had left Innocenta's room, Felicia announced a stranger impatiently waiting in the boudoir.

"If I intrude upon you thus abruptly and at so unreasonable an hour," said the new-comer, "it is for a reason you will think sufficient. My name is Candale; I am sent here by the Duke Valentino. I made such haste from Imola that I ruined three horses—and it seems I was well-nigh too late."

"Too late for what?"

"I learned of your escape when I galloped in just now; the guards were talking about the woman found poisoned; your enemies got her by mistake. My orders are made tenfold more imperative by this. Valentino was warned of your danger by a magician, and I am commanded to

remove you from the Vatican to a place of safety, and thence to Ferrara."

He ceased speaking as Catalina appeared. She bowed slightly to him, and addressing Elvira, said: "Giulia Farnèse greets you, and bids you to breakfast with her two hours hence; she has much to ask, everything to offer."

"My thanks to Donna Giulia, but I am fatigued and troubled—beg her to excuse my absence," and Catalina withdrew without a word.

"Quick, if you value life!" ejaculated Candale.

"What mean you?"

"Mean—that what failed last night is to be achieved before sunset. Leave everything with this lady, she is not their object; bring your maid with you and come."

"But—" began Elvira.

"Lady," interrupted Candale, "I have explained my mission; do not compel me to use force."

"What place is this," cried Elvira with a burst of anger, "where women are seized in their beds by night, and threatened with force in their rooms by day?"

"Cesare Borgia is better able to explain that than I."

"You are a stranger to me: this may be another decoy."

"How dull to have forgotten!" and Candale drew from under his doublet a gold chain which

the Estense recognized as one Cesare habitually wore.

"I am satisfied," she said; "grant me a moment to make ready."

The Spaniard's patience failed. "A plague on all women," he said; "we are fortunate if we escape now; Catalina will have warned her mistress of my arrival—we may find a picket of condottieri on the stair." And he caught the young girl by the wrist, and sternly bade Felicia follow.

"At least my cloak"—and throwing it on as she followed, and with her terrified maid at her heels, Elvira fled, leaving her duenna stunned by the words she had overheard.

The sun was up as they issued forth unchallenged. They walked as fast as the women could go, Candale leading to del Nero's, where their arrival caused some astonishment. Elvira was shown with her maid to a room hastily cleared for their accommodation. Del Nero, roused from a long winter night's sleep, put on an excessive show of gallantry until brought to seriousness by the sight of the silver whistle and the gold chain. "Are you ready to set out this morning?" asked Candale of him.

"By mid-day I will have good horses, provisions, and ten trusty men equipped. Is there danger of pursuit?"

"We were not followed here," replied Candale, "but to-morrow news of the direction of our flight may come."

"Then," said del Nero, "let me dispatch a messenger direct to Valentino; he will send a troop of horse half way."

"Well thought," answered Candale. "Lady Elvira," he continued, "spare us your maid; one of the men here will attend her, she can make such purchases as are essential. And however humble this abode, you will presently make a more auspicious breakfast than Giulia Farnèse would have set before you."

Candale had placed his charge in safety when Ginevra appeared in Giulia's apartment. "It failed then?" she said under her breath.

"Yes; no time to explain. I am glad you are here. She refuses to come to me; something must be done. I am brought to bay."

"Oh Heaven, Giulia, be prudent!"

"It were imprudence to hesitate now."

Catalina burst upon them in a tumult of excitement. "My lady," she cried, "we are betrayed—it must be Candale."

"What mischief have you now to tell?" exclaimed Giulia fiercely.

"Elvira has left the palace—escaped!"

They looked at one another, Catalina in conster-

nation, Giulia scarlet with rage. Then Ginevra laughed bitterly as she said, "If you cannot manage better than this, Lucretia's words will yet come true—that girl will drive you from the Vatican."

CHAPTER VIII.

A FALCON HUNT.

In a sombre, deep-raftered chamber of the palace at Forlì which two years before had been the residence of Catarina Sforza, sat the brothers Pagolo and Francesco Orsini. The clear winter day was fading before the twilight which crept stealthily over the sky and extinguished its fires. A chess table stood between them, and absorbed in the combinations of the game, the players had made their alternate moves for an hour, almost without speaking. Though not handsome men, both were intellectual looking—not always a characteristic of soldier captains in an age when war was merciless and conquest unsparing. Both were habited in cloth tunics, tight-fitting breeches, and tanned boots; a poniard at the side, a gold chain round the collar, their swords and feathered caps near by: it was the equipment of chiefs off duty and able to dispense with burdensome accoutrements. Pagolo was the elder—a black-bearded man with firm profile, sad-expressioned eyes, hair thin at the temples and frosting at the sides. Francesco—

Duke of Gravina as he was often called—was in age half a dozen years his junior, but the difference between them in appearance was greater; time had told less upon the younger brother. Both had lived since youth amid the schooling and excitement of arms; Pagolo was the more skilful commander, Francesco the more impetuous. The game just finishing was an index to their natures; Gravina had commenced a clever but imperfectly combined attack upon his opponent's developing position, had, through an oversight, exchanged a rook for a knight, had lost the move, and seeing a formidable onset gathering, had conceived a bold counterstroke, when, in the course of a change of front, his Queen became ensnared among the enemy's light troops.

"It grows so dim," said Pagolo, "we must either call for lights, or imagine the game ended."

"No great effort of fancy is required for that," answered Gravina, with good nature. "It is finished, or would be in a moment;" and rising, he walked to the door and ordered a servant in waiting to bring lights. A candelabrum was forthwith placed upon the centre table casting a flickering glow about the room, which was hung with three solemn portraits of departed Sforzas, one a knight whose lineaments looked unbending as his armor, another of a lady in the dress of a by-gone century, and the third of a boy incased in toy cuirass, his

faded little face looking from the dark background with wistful, wondering gaze. An oaken press faced the high, shallow fireplace, some carved chairs with leather cushions, two tables and a buffet on which stood wine flasks, completed the furniture. To one of these latter Gravina now turned his attention.

"To the defeated, chess is a thirsty game," he remarked. His brother had risen and was looking from the window at the Piazza, where lights appeared here and there in the windows.

"Remember that Ramiro sups with us presently," Pagolo answered.

"Which means a swallow, not a draught, eh? By the way, have we something dainty, or only garrison fare?"

"What epicures our soldiers grow! We shall have better than ordinary; did not I tell you that while Ramiro eats at our table, it is he who brings the provision?"

"So much the better; he will have bagged all the milk and honey in the land—which reminds me that Cesare has some new-fangled idea about supplies following in wagons; the old way is much better; let the army pursue the supplies—so means our motto *Avanti.*"

"In truth we fare poorly," quoth Pagolo; "between dried beef and scanty levies, I wish myself in Rome. We might have been absent a month;

nothing has been doing all winter, though we shall presently have occupation enough."

"Cesare has not come to Forlì merely to inspect."

"'Tis three months since we saw him; he has not been idle the while; the husband he wanted for Lucretia, Urbino taken, and now this affair at Camerino."

"Which think you the greater fool, Guidobaldo to give up his artillery, or Varano to wait and be strangled?"

"Valentino is in high spirits over it all; he was writing verses this morning."

"It is Vitellozzo who incites him against Florence; he has not forgotten the murder of his brother."

"Less to avenge his brother than to add a strip to Città di Castello: call it revenge and profit combined; the two make a high sense of duty."

Gravina stroked his beard reflectively as he observed, "I have heard him say that his chief pleasure is in thinking what he would do to his enemies —men and women—were they in his power."

"How much a man must have suffered before he speaks thus, even in jest," answered the philosophic Pagolo; "for he has too good a digestion to be really bad at heart. Talking of digestion, I would that Ramiro were here with his supper."

"You spoke of accompanying him on some excursion last night."

"Ay, a fool's errand to Castel del Moro."

"Hidden treasure again?"

"Ghosts this time; Ramiro said that thieves had found refuge in it, and had been taken for goblins by a patrol. I said, 'I will take a score of men and bring you whatever is there.' 'So be it,' he answered, adding that he would go with me for the sake of the night ride. An hour brought us to the ruin, and a more plague-stricken spot I never beheld."

"Nor I who digged through its foundations for the sake of that dying soldier's story."

"And you left the subterranean passages obstructed, and the wet has gathered and soaked till there is an odor of decay about the very stones. We searched the cellars and found only lizards and toads, thence I led the way up some winding steps; an owl on the rampart gave a cry—something before me moved, I drew pistol and fired—all was still—then the soldiers behind came clambering after bearing torches. Absurd as it was to be alarmed, the men were under great excitement. I sought to reassure them, and Ramiro ordered all to the upper chambers. We climbed over fallen stones to that steep bend which leads by a sort of fox burrow to the terrace. Whilst we were peering about, the rain burst upon us, and it became impossible to keep the torches alight except under cover. Ramiro swore at the men and ordered them

on, while I remained alone a moment looking around me; and will you believe it, I saw——"

The door opened, and Ramiro d'Orco, dressed with unusual ornament, entered.

"A thousand pardons for having kept you waiting," he began, "'tis not my fault, as I have but this moment left Valentino's study. He was tuning a guitar when I came in, whence I inferred that the business to which he had summoned me would be brief; but it lasted an hour. May we lay our little spread on this table?" he continued, as servants followed bearing wicker baskets.

"Lay on in the name of all the saints, and never was visitor more welcome."

The governor laughed.

"May the contents of the panniers prove to your taste," he said, throwing aside his hat and sword. "It is the result of a levy on two refractory households—the tit-bits from each."

The domestics were busy with the table service, and the three officers had seated themselves, when Ramiro interrupted their chat, and with a humorous smile, unusual to his stern physiognomy, exclaimed,

"Hark, the guitar—Cesare is about to sing, we can hear him from the hall."

"It must be the song I left him composing this morning," whispered Pagolo, as they rose.

"Another of his ballads," answered Ramiro

under his breath; "he writes a couplet a day when in good humor."

A prelude of mournful sweetness filled the air; then the familiar voice sang the following stanzas with tender and lingering expression:

Je t'ay bien aymé, ma mye, bien aymée;
Et mon cueur bat d'yvresse et d'envye
Quand ton bel souvenir me souryt.—
Ce fust au renouveau, emmy les fleurs
Nous fusmes au printems de la vie,
A l'appel respondirent nos cueurs,
Tu me donnas une fleur et un bayser.

Aujourdhuy c'est le triste yver qui chante.
Seule fleur ce soir est de toy la pensée,
Et ce soir de ta vive ymaige animée
Je te vois—je sens ta voix charmante,
Ton regard altièr, le parfum de tes lèvres,
De ceste jeunesse renaist les fièvres—
Je t'ai bien aymé, ma mye, bien aymée.

"French," ejaculated Pagolo; "heretofore he has rendered his doggerel in our own tongue."

"A droll theme for one who has debauched so many virtues," remarked Ramiro.

"Nay," answered Gravina, "to a roué there is no memory so poignant as that of the girl he first kissed—and who escaped him."

They returned to the supper from which the Orsini could no longer have been kept, however sweet a bird had carolled. An appetizer of lobster

was followed by a saddle of mutton, a brace of pheasants, a ham, and preserved fruits.

"Valentino could have had nothing of consequence to say if he required an hour to talk," remarked Gravina; "when important things are to be dispatched, his speech is brief as a repartee."

"Mere details," answered Ramiro. "He has been inspecting at Imola, and after some play here with your pretty battalions, he intends to bring Vitellozzo and Oliverotto to this neighborhood, and you are to do great things."

"Against Florence, of course; which puts us in an embarrassing attitude towards King Louis."

"Cesare will act first and explain afterwards; besides, the French alliance was a temporary makeshift."

"It were with ill grace Louis should move against his sister's husband."

"What sort of woman is Charlotte d'Albret?" asked Gravina. "Will she never come to Italy?"

"I have heard from Ives d'Allégre that she is a woman with no aim or occupation or interest in life; but on one point she is decided: three days with Borgia were sufficient; she vows she will never look him in the face again."

The brothers laughed, while the more serious Ramiro continued to describe Valentino's pungent married life. His narrative was nearly at an end,

and the fowls were picked to the bone, when an officer entered, and saluting Ramiro, said,

"She has arrived."

"Ha!" exclaimed Ramiro, "it is a girl from Ferrara, in whom Cesare takes such interest that he sent a troop to meet her on the road to Rome. I learned that much from Michelotto."

The door again opened, and Cesare's major-domo, Don Jayme de Resequenz, bowed and said, "The duke desires the governor's presence."

"So soon," muttered Ramiro; "quick," he added, speaking to the servants, "a basin of water." He washed his hands—a necessary observance before forks were used—and promising to rejoin his companions, strode across to Cesare's apartment.

Valentino was seated at a spacious table strewn with letters; in the middle was a wooden writing-case containing ink, a bundle of quills, seals, wax, a taper, and parchment paper; beside it were two tin water-proof cylinders in which important documents were carried. Before him was seated Candale, splashed and travel-stained.

"Ramiro," said the duke, as that personage entered, "listen to this."

"I was giving an account of my journey to Rome," explained the Spaniard, with a salutation to his colleague. "At Urbino a cavalry escort met us, and we proceeded without further concern.

I was charged with the safety of a lady. The fifth day five horsemen came in view behind us. They halted; we were but twelve in number, and I supposed them the advance of a pursuit we expected. In that moment's pause the lady began screaming, and galloped off, leaving no choice but to follow. Whoever the men were, they did not pursue us farther."

"You lost your head as badly as did your charge," said Cesare. "You and half the men could have made an end of the knaves, Ramiro. I summoned you, that you may scatter light horse southward, and bring me those five fellows."

And Ramiro having withdrawn, Cesare returned to the story of the attempt to seize Elvira, which Candale had been briefly relating.

On the evening of the eighth day after Ramiro's supper with the Orsini, a rough clad man bearing a basket and armed with cross-bow slung at the back, trudged out of Forlì, and gained the wood that lies to the north of the city; his progress became more difficult as he proceeded, and often he stopped in the twilight, seeking some indication of his course. After an eight-mile tramp, he came in sight of some rocks over the top of which a watchman was peeping, and on making his way to the farther side, he found an officer preparing a fire, while a soldier dressed a piece of meat for the

evening repast, and another trimmed branches for fuel.

"Fieschi!" exclaimed he by the fire, rising and holding out his hand, "you are indeed welcome."

"And glad am I to be here," said the newcomer; "I feared for my life at every hour in Forlì."

Seating themselves apart from their followers the two fell into whispered discourse.

The pursuit which Candale described had been made by the five men from a hiding-place in the Apennines where Oliverotto had stationed them to receive Elvira in case of her abduction by Brazos, of which the dwarf had informed him. On the failure of the plot, Pulcio had sent to their captain, indicating the direction taken by the fugitives. Fieschi, finding his object guarded by a larger escort than the jester had described, had given over further pursuit, and both he and his colleague Campana would have abandoned so perilous an adventure, but for the thought of their captain's displeasure.

Giulia Farnèse had explained the Estense's abrupt departure to the Pontiff with the words, "Your son's mistress has gone to join him;" and the indifference with which the venerable debauchee listened, revealed to Giulia the error of her suspicion, and to Pulcio she now forbade the mention of their failure.

Fieschi and Campana, followed by their three

troopers, had turned aside from the highway and had taken refuge in the thicket where we now find them. The plan to seize Elvira in the garden of the Isotella palace, had been dismissed as beyond their daring. The two confederates had ventured into the city in search of information, whence Campana returned without other result than a hair-breadth escape from a patrol; but Fieschi had made his way to a *trattoria* kept by a fine-looking woman with whom his acquaintance was not of recent date. Concealed off the large room in which her visitors seated themselves for refreshment and gossip, he gathered an outline of a gala-day in the fields which Cesare had commanded for Elvira's amusement. A groom mentioned the number of attendants, a thirsty horseman boasted of being one of the *corps d'élite* which should be stationed where it was proposed to hunt, a pastry cook made the mouths of his auditors water by his description of the dishes for a repast *al fresco*.

"We will watch the edge of this wood," said Fieschi, closing the recital of the particulars he had gathered; "the birds may fly hither, the falcons will indicate the course of the cavalcade, one may presume this girl will be at the front; as for the attendants, galloping scatters them."

At an early hour on the following morning, Cesare, accompanied by Francesco Orsini, Miche-

lotto and Candale, and followed by pages and attendants bearing the hooded falcons of the chase, rode to the palace where Elvira had been lodged, and where she mounted the white palfrey selected for her. The fatigue of her flight through the Apennines and the tension of her last hours in Rome had produced a nervous prostration. Cesare sent to inquire after her health, and on the third day, returning from a drill of Gravina's troops, he stopped to dissuade Elvira from immediately proceeding to Ferrara, and advised awaiting her duenna; reverting to something she had once said of the chase, he proposed a falcon hunt. He made no allusion to the events of that Sunday night, merely remarking:

"You will find Forlì a pleasanter residence than the Vatican, and as for Donna Innocenta, here is a letter from Giulia Farnèse, saying she mends fast, and expressing the belief that the miscreants who disturbed her will presently be brought to light." He left to return on the morrow, inquiring if she yet felt equal to a day in the fields; they strolled awhile up and down the garden, and continued the promenade the day after.

Said Don Michele: "That woman will yet do Valentino as much mischief as he can bring her; he has never been so neglectful of affairs."

"I attended him to the practice of Gravina's cross-bowmen," remarked Candale, "and he took

no more heed of their shooting than had they been barking dogs."

A galaxy of brilliant figures they rode out of the town, with horses gaudily caparisoned, the huntsmen bearing falcons and a guard of troopers following. To Elvira, the sunshine, the balmy air, the violet tints of the Apennines were as grateful as the sense of security after danger.

"How fragrant is the breeze that comes from the mountains," she exclaimed, her face flushing with enjoyment.

"It is sweeter than the perfume of wine," answered the matter-of-fact Gravina.

"And will it be clear till evening?"

"Yes, for the sun dispelled the clouds ere he had run an hour on his course."

"Such a day brings a pang with its briefness and beauty; one thinks of the things that make it happy and that pass with it."

"You should be a painter," laughed Valentino, "to catch the fleeting brilliance."

They turned from the highway and rode towards a glade where Cesare, unknown to his fair guest, had stationed men with cages of captive birds. Two pheasants rose, apparently from the branches, and Elvira set free the falcon which had been placed hooded upon her hand, and the fierce little creature, with one nervous glance around, dashed away in pursuit.

"Let slip yours too, Michelotto," said Borgia, "or that second escapes;" he busied himself meanwhile with his own falcon, which was an exceptional gamester, reserved for serious combats.

Don Michele's bird was off like an arrow, and the pheasants, dividing slightly in their flight, the cavalcade became similarly separated, Cesare and Elvira and Gravina hastening after the first falcon, and Candale galloping in the direction taken by Michelotto's. It was a brief course, the pheasants being quickly overtaken. The falcons had not yet returned when three pigeons arose.

"A hundred sequins my Hector takes them all!" cried Gravina.

"Accepted," answered Cesare, and the Orsini rode after his bird, which having killed one pigeon turned in pursuit of the second, while the third, profiting by the moment's opportunity, flew swiftly in an opposite direction.

And now from the well-stocked grove appeared an eaglet, which after an upward half circle, directed its course towards the Apennines. Candale from a neighboring field dispatched his falcon, and Cesare unhooded "Romulus."

The hawks gained upon their prey, and the king of birds became conscious of impending attack. Wheeling abruptly, he darted upon Candale's falcon, which was the nearest, and would have over-

powered his assailant, but for the arrival of "Romulus," who joined with beak and talons in the fray—and feathers were seen to fall, and cries distinctly heard. "Romulus" decided the contest; taking advantage of an instant when their foe's attention was occupied by his companion, he darted upward and fastened his talons in the eagle's back, the latter freed himself with a violent plunge, and abandoning the battle, flew northward pursued by his assailants.

"Quick, thy bow!" exclaimed Cesare to an archer; he sent the shaft straight towards the eagle, but at a few hand-breadths from its mark, the arrow ceased its upward course and dropped back. The cavalcade now became divided, the more ardent far in front, the guards and servants cantering after in no haste to go far from the appointed rendezvous, where a bite and sup awaited the humblest. In approaching the wood, they plunged together among the trees, Borgia leading, Michelotto some distance to the left, Candale still farther beyond him, Elvira a few lengths behind, and all were instantly lost to the sight of their followers.

Michelotto, Candale, and Cesare heard it, a faint cry of alarm, but Cesare alone divined what was occurring. Now there was an ominous silence, and they dashed at random this way and that. Michelotto was the first to come upon the spot where

Elvira had run full upon those who had gathered as she approached, and who had sprung upon her, silenced her, and were tying a thong about her wrists.

"Be off with her quick," cried one of the men, drawing his sword and wiping the blood from a gash in his face that Elvira's stiletto had made.

"To the rescue," shouted Don Michele, unsheathing his own blade as they spurred their horses upon one another, while Elvira and her captors disappeared in the greenwood.

This combat would have proved a difficult one for the Spaniard, armed as he was with only an ornamental fleuret, while his antagonist wielded a long and heavy sword, but for the arrival of Candale, when, without further ado, the condottiere wheeled about and galloped off, hoping to draw their pursuit after himself; in this he was for a few moments successful, but the steeds of his pursuers were no match for a fresh horse, and their riders presently drew bridle.

"Call the guards," said Michelotto to Candale, "whilst I hasten after the men that seized Donna Elvira; they cannot have led her far."

In this conjecture he was right, and for the reason that Cesare had ridden into their little group. When Don Michele arrived upon the scene, there were three persons in view. Elvira dismounted, or fallen from her horse, Cesare supporting her in

his arms, while a few paces distant lay Fieschi dead, with a thrust of Valentino's blade through his heart; the men had taken flight upon the fall of their leader. Michelotto laughed to himself as, through the branches, he caught the first words that Elvira uttered—

"You are splendid!" she cried aloud, and Cesare's answer, "I knew not till now that I love you."

Michelotto, Candale, and a score of troopers and servants appeared, and Elvira was raised to her saddle; having seen her cared for, and ordered his lieutenants to escort her, Cesare galloped back to Forlì, called del Nero, told him what had happened, bade him add as many soldiers to his band as he pleased, and never give over the chase. The next morning the condottiere returned, and after some hasty questions and answers as to the result of his search, made the following report.

When I found the trace we followed it to a camp, and thence across a brook where were the prints of four horses, showing that the man who crossed swords with Don Michele had fallen in with his comrades. We continued at a trot, till at the Campodifiori cross roads it became a guess had they turned right or left; as we were twenty, I sent ten to the left, and took the right with the others. Passing Castel del Moro, Felipe remarked a man would take refuge there, so we surrounded

the place. It was dark now, but we had lanterns. I fear nothing—but a ghost is not to be trifled with. In the main building all was deserted, and we had just reached the top, when a great light flared on the wall, and in the midst of it appeared Satan himself, horns, tail, red eyes—and from overhead came a peal of laughter; then the light faded, the spectre vanished, and we tumbled over one another till we were out of the place and astride our horses.

Occasionally meeting a patrol, we rode as far as the town, questioning the guards and searching the few houses. It came to be sunrise, and I thought to rest an hour at an hostelry within the gate. While the woman served, she that is mistress of the house, tears gathered in her eyes: "What is amiss, commadre?" I asked, and she answered her cat had died, and sobbed, and said it mattered not. I watched her keenly while remarking, "There was a fine young fellow killed in the woods yesterday, and we are after his mate—had she seen one or more cavaliers?" and she changed color, and her hand trembled.

"Speak out," I thundered, "or you shall learn the duke has means to loosen stiff tongues."

Then she burst out crying, and dropped on her knees, and vowed it was no affair of hers—a man had arrived on foot at dark with his head bound and a bleeding gash down his face, and he asked

for a leech, saying he could go no farther. So she called the blacksmith, who presently heating a nail red hot, caught a moment when the other's eyes were closed, and was going to draw the iron along the cut, but at the first touch the stranger gave a yell, bounded out into the street and was seen no more. She declared with many protestations she knew him not, so I left three men to guard her and hastened hither.

"She shall be made to tell," mused Borgia. "Ramiro!" he exclaimed, "take her to the castle and put her to the question—and haste, minutes are precious. Have you heard nothing, Candale, from the patrols?"

"Only that the country for miles swarms with them, and that the dead officer has been recognized as captain of a troop of horse in Oliverotto's corps."

Valentino, Don Michele, and del Nero listened with amaze to this declaration, but it only added a motive for persuading the woman to speak—alas for her!—the woman for whom the question was to be made ready.

CHAPTER IX.

AREZZO.

THE Tuscan campaign, for months anticipated by Borgia's lieutenants, and apprehended by the Republic which was its aim, was opened later in the season than either had expected. A new amour could divert even Borgia from the crisis of his designs, and not till the end of May were Cesare's armaments perfected, and the battalions and squadrons moved into convenient proximity without making a threatening assemblage at any single point. Cesare was ever slow in making ready, according to his maxim:

The more time to prepare, the less to execute.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Republic of Florence had reached a critical degree of inaptness in arms. The old strength still existed, but the pacific policy of the Medici had softened her mettle; an eight years' struggle with her sturdy little Pisan rival had drained the last remaining military resource; the strife of Guelph and Ghibelline for power, and the bitterness of individual feuds, had poisoned the spirit not only of her citizens, but of the villages and valleys of Tus-

cany. Patriotism, though always narrow, had once been deep; now, its conception was contained in the defence of a space the eye could cover.

Dante never imagined a united Italy; and Machiavelli, the most profound and astute commentator upon the affairs of the Peninsula, aspired to a league of republics as the loftiest ideal. Both were Florentines, both present to us the pulse, the measure, the accent of their time; the latter understood better than any other of his age the source of Italian weakness and its remedy; yet he finds it in him to give this sinister counsel to King Louis: "If you would retain Milan, kill the head of every leading family"—a speech more significant of degradation, when considered as the utterance of an Italian statesman prescribing to an invader the means of perpetuating the subjection of an Italian city—than the mere analysis and classification of accepted theories as set forth in his celebrated treatise upon force and fraud, *Il Principe.*

And now before a commonwealth thus stripped of sword and buckler, and distraught by a thousand hates, appeared the menace of French invasion from the north; while to the southward gathered the bands of the stealthy son of the Church. The impending attack had been so long threatening, the campaign season was so far advanced without even a menacing concentration, that hostilities seemed deferred at least until autumn.

On the first of June, Oliverotto's division still lay cantoned at distant Camerino; the corps under Vitellozzo was distributed through his little tenure of Città di Castello; at Imola, Borgia was expected to resume drills and inspections. Suddenly the columns of the Orsini traversed the Apennines and joined with Vitellozzo; a cavalry division under Candale crossed the frontier; a hired band of conspirators raised a tumult in Arezzo, the town most immediately exposed to attack; its commandant sent for succor; but with a force ten times his own without, and defection within, he yielded on the third day. Vitellozzo entered at the head of his corps, amid strains of martial music—rude, harsh, strident, and suited to the grim soldiery that trudged behind him dust-covered and travel-stained, but with weapons and armor faultless in kind and condition. After them rode Candale with long files of horsemen and the cannon train of Urbino. The arms of the Church were both long and strong in those days, and the timid townsfolk, confronted by invasion after many years of repose, looked on with silent and sombre forebodings. But they were presently relieved from immediate alarm.

Vitellozzo, albeit in Borgia's pay, and commanding the vanguard of his army, had personal aspirations not included within the scope of his employer's programme; he intended to annex Arezzo to his own adjacent patrimony, in realization of a long-

nursed project, which now, thus easily effected, doubled his acres at a stroke. He possessed an independent barony at Città di Castello, where were his wife, his children, and his worldly goods, and where it was easy to hold undisputed mastery, provided he owned allegiance to some prince or state able to shield him in emergency.

The ominous thought had lately forced itself upon him that Urbino and Camerino were also allies and under the protection of Rome, and what costly and sanguinary protection had it proved! Of Cesare's lieutenants the roughest and the most reckless of speech, one tender emotion remained—love for his wife, his little Anselmo, and the serious-eyed Francesca. A lifetime passed amid scenes of bloodshed and extortion had hardened the man, till but that one responsive spot remained. Yet whoever had seen them, Vitellozzo, Anselmo, and Francesca, the three at play together in the orchard, tossing apples towards the tree tops, or at the mill-pond launching mimic argosies, or in some hayfield chasing one another with peals of mirth, might have deemed them young of heart and guileless one as the other.

To be with them, and with the gentle helpmate who was the peaceful centre of his stormy life, was Vitellozzo's only pleasure, apart from the triumphs of his profession; to add to the extent and consideration of his tenure for Anselmo's

sake, was now his absorbing aim—his only motive for continuing in the career of arms. It was as yet a diminutive possession. His palace was insignificant. His castle was of the uncompromising architecture of the time—a couple of plain towers, a central keep, and surrounding walls pierced on one side by the main gate, on another by a postern which commanded the ravine below. Around were two or three hundred houses, a couple of churches, a monastery, a windmill. Such was Città di Castello. Such it is still, save that the windmill is replaced by clumsier modern mechanism, the monastery converted to a public school, the palace to a wayside inn, the castle grown hoary and seamed with age.

Vitellozzo had bidden farewell to his wife with good cheer, to Francesca with a caress, to Anselmo with a jesting promise:

"Little rogue, thou shalt be Prince of Arezzo ere the new moon." And he kissed them all tenderly, and mounted his horse and rode away.

The cold-blooded Candale was not astonished at Vitellozzo's greedy humor about "my conquest at Arezzo;"—he had seen too many strange things to be any more surprised, but he listened and watched. And now arrived the two Orsini with their sturdy regiments, and after came the harpies that scent the spoils. These were Pandolfo Petrucci of Siena, Baglioni, Prince of Perugia, having as *aide-*

de-camp the young Fabio Orsini, and lastly Cardinal de Medici and Piero de Medici, both girded for a triumphal entry into Florence, its government overthrown, its demagogues chastised, its haughty pride humbled.

Vitellozzo, with his companions-in-arms and his self-invited guests, rode around the town surveying it as one who takes note of a house just acquired. And in the exultation of a long-coveted possession he cried aloud,

"This shall be a Princedom for my Anselmuccio."

But Candale looked grave, and answered, "Have we not jointly taken this for our master, and is it not his?"

Then Vitellozzo swore a great oath, and stopped them all as they trooped across the rolling meadows, and said,

"The lion's share is enough for our master; let the jackals that do his bidding find a morsel once in their lifetime."

"It is a bold course," again objected Candale.

"No bolder than for him to strip the tenements and the life from them that serve him! Have you forgot that Guidobaldo was a friend? We drove him forth houseless after a trick so shameful that as a soldier I despise myself for having shared in it."

"He was lucky to escape with his life," interposed Petrucci.

"And," continued Vitellozzo, whose brain seemed burdened with other people's grievances, "and Camerino—was not Verano as much Cesare's servant as I?—and Cesare had him and his son strangled not one hundred days gone, that he might own their humble patch of land. And before that, Pesaro taken from an ally, and Forlì from a woman, and Faenza from the Manfredi he had promised to protect, and Imola, because it could not resist—is it strange if I wonder who shall be next?—Will it be you, Pagolo," he exclaimed, turning to the elder Orsini—"you whose possessions are equal to the Borgias', father and son together?"

A shade passed over Pagolo's face as he answered: "You are of cheerless humor; one would think you had lost instead of taken Arezzo; for myself, I fear no foe and dread no fortune; but methinks the dullest should see that our security with Valentino lies in that we are instruments not to be replaced."

The Medici listened to this dispute with keen relish; to the weak there is no music so sweet as the discord of the strong.

"Hear I not yonder a bugle?" interrupted Candale, chafing; "let us ride on."

Said Petrucci, as they followed at a little distance: "Poor Vitellozzo, his temper was soured; all this irritability comes from that letter his—let me think, was it his great-grandfather?——"

"His great-grandfather's uncle," corrected Fabio Orsini.

"True; well, I cannot wonder he thought himself the victim of an unfeeling jest. Fancy a sealed paper handed down through generations towards an unborn descendant; imagine yourself that favored heir; assume that you have heard that sacred letter talked of in boyhood, and have impatiently waited for it through youth; picture the visions and loves and conquests you have built upon the treasure it is to reveal; open that letter on the appointed day, and, instead of a clue to the gold of the Caliphs, find ten sheets of good advice."

"No wonder," laughed the younger Medici, "that for a day or two he vowed he would join the Barefoot Friars."

"He would have made a stalwart mendicant," assented his brother the cardinal, with his eyes upon Vitellozzo's huge proportions; "the women would all have confessed to him."

"Then 'tis better he wait till time consume his fires," chuckled Baglioni of Perugia. "At seventy he will make a grand old Monsignore."

An hour later half a dozen of them sat in the bishop-governor's castle, still clad in the armor which incased them, save that their visors were thrown up, and their gauntlets laid aside.

Said Candale: "We should profit by this sur-

prise and hasten on at dawn to-morrow. Valentino will be with us in five days, and you, Vitellozzo, had best have something valuable to offer if you think to keep this to yourself."

The experienced Pagolo joined in this counsel: "Let us move this afternoon," he said, "on Borgo San Sepolcro, and assault it to-morrow." Then, very seriously and earnestly, he added, "But do not, Vitellozzo, take this capture to yourself. It is neither yours nor mine. It was the first object and aim of us all. Why should you more than another say, This prize is mine? Ask it as a gift, and I will urge your request, but till then be it our common gain."

"Pagolo," answered the Condottiere thus addressed, "what you say is discreet, and according to rule and custom, and it lies not with me to distribute. But this *shall* be mine—to the dogs with rule and custom. *This*," he continued in a voice swelling with emotion, "I have watched for years. *This* I have followed in its little growth, planning how it should increase under my hand. For years *this* has been my purpose, something to strive for to-day, something to occupy my declining years hereafter. And now I have my desire, my troops hold its gates, the town was taken without bloodshed, the citizens will not couple the remembrance of their dead with their thought of me, the longing of hope is realized—and in the first pride and joy

of possession, you bid me stand back—and I answer you all, beware!"

"Methinks," said Gravina, as he watched the angered Vitellozzo pacing up and down, "that this is not ours to settle. As Pagolo says, let us to horse, march to some town, I care not which, thence to another, till we come upon the enemy, or till Cesare arrive to direct us."

This was agreed to, and an hour later the troopers of Candale departed with Vitellozzo's corps, except the garrison of Arezzo, following. Pagolo Orsini and the Duke of Gravina came after with their regiments, their relatives the Medici, and the chiefs of Siena and Perugia in their midst casting admiring glances at the artillery, the gift, as it was facetiously termed, of Guidobaldo. All the mounted officers were cased in mail, and for the most part in black-painted armor, a fashion recently in vogue. Some of the visors were worked in droll imitation of the human face, Gravina's having a sharp, aquiline nose, Candale's wearing a sinister smile upon its curving iron lips, Pagolo's a solemn, menacing expression, and Vitellozzo's being of such weighty construction about the jaws as to give the head a boar-like expression, whence his surname among the soldiers—Il Cignale.

The troops bivouacked before San Sepolcro, and lighting a line of fires sat down to supper, while Gravina advanced and summoned the garrison. This

was refused, with great show of valor, by the governor, who had never seen a stroke dealt in anger; but when the next day's sun revealed the swarming masses of infantry and a score of cannon ready to batter his vine-cumbered walls—and when the carnage of an assault rose to his imagination, he opened the gates and bade his men lay down their bloodless arms.

The intelligence of the capture of Arezzo had been promptly dispatched by Candale to Valentino. By changing horses at relays upon the rear of the army, it was possible for the messenger to reach Faenza two days after the capture, only to find that Cesare had left that morning for Imola. The rider was soaked by the rain which had been falling for some hours, but mounting a fresh horse, he spurred away through the storm. When nearly in sight of his destination, he came upon a cavalcade accompanying a travelling carriage which, at that time in Italy, was a long cart on four wheels, without pole or springs, and with a covering of canvas stretched over wooden hoops. From it had alighted two women, and it could be seen that one of the supports had broken and that the covering had split, exposing the interior to the rain. Before them stood a young man who had sprung from his horse, and whom the messenger recognized to be Valentino.

"We shall have it in order on the instant," he heard Cesare say, as the rent cover was tacked with twine, and Elvira and her maid, wrapped in trooper's cloaks, resumed their places: the cavalcade was about to move, when Cesare's glance fell on the stranger, whose equipment showed him to be of Candale's troop.

"What news?" he asked.

The man dismounted, saluted, and said:

"Arezzo was taken two days since without loss."

"Do you hear, Elvira?" exclaimed the duke, "the first flower of this campaign;—it shall be yours." Then turning to the soldier, he said:

"Follow me to Imola, and you shall carry back a dispatch."

At Imola, where they alighted an hour later, Cesare and Elvira pursued their talk and their pastimes and the sports that were ordered for their diversion for five days, with ever and anon a declaration from Cesare that on the morrow he would speed to the field.

At last came a morning prolific in the intelligence for which he declared himself waiting. First a letter from the Pope, filled with suggestions as to this new enterprise, and correctly predicting that the French King would require a weighty sop.

"My counsel," wrote the old statesman, "is to strike at Florence; take it by assault, and then buy off the French; they will permit the complete

overthrow of their ally as easily as attacks upon her frontier; and the one will be no more costly than the other."

Following this came a dispatch from d'Aubigny, forbidding, in the King's name, any further aggressions upon Florence, and announcing the departure of a force of two thousand French and three thousand Swiss, all under command of le Sieur Langres, to the relief of her threatened frontier. The King," concluded the writer, "is incensed against these condottieri, who have plundered so many princes, and are now presuming to molest the domain of an ally of France."

Next arrived a cautious epistle from Candale, dwelling upon Vitellozzo's appropriation of Arezzo, and hinting at lukewarmness on the part of the Orsini, whom he suspected of being in treaty with the French, or with the Florentines, or with both. The writer complained that the army was still at Borgo San Sepolcro, where it had lain inactive.

"In treaty with the French!" ejaculated Cesare, laying down the parchment with evident and profound concern. "Can they have so far anticipated me?"

Then he fell into a reverie over this sudden entanglement. Ought he to have led the army? It now seemed so, for no dissensions would then have paralyzed his hirelings. His shallow stratagem of loitering at Imola had deceived no one, and

he began to wonder what lethargy had stolen these last weeks from him. His amour had proved costly. It was now too late to save the military situation. No alternative remained but to reverse his attitude of an assailant, and avert from himself the fatal wrath of the French King. With this aim he dispatched Don Michele to Milan with a letter and a douceur for Cardinal Amboise, who had his Majesty's ear; Michelotto was to give every assurance that this irruption had been made without Cesare's knowledge, that he would willingly turn his arms against the upstart Vitellozzo, and he was to ask that Valentino be received by his royal brother-in-law, when all should be explained. To Candale he wrote, bidding him hasten from the coming storm and withdraw across the Apennines with his horsemen and with whatever else would follow. To Vitellozzo and the Orsini he sent no word, silently leaving them to bear the brunt of a possible rencounter with the French.

"A thinning out would tame these unruly varlets," he muttered passionately, "and they fight savagely enough to damp this French ardor for meddling with me at every turn; twice before has Louis baulked me; it might be a stroke of fortune if they met."

His meditations were interrupted by the announcement of a Spanish gentleman named Pedro de Castro, serving with Oliverotto, and reputed an

officer of distinguished qualities. At Cesare's bidding he seated himself.

"You must have had an evil spirit behind you," remarked Valentino, surveying the other's boots and breeches, all splashed with mud.

"What tidings from Camerino?"

"None from Camerino, all there is quiet; but Oliverotto——"

"Is he dead?" cried Borgia, with startling abruptness.

"It might be well."

"Quick, tell me the substance."

"The substance is that Oliverotto has killed his uncle, and seized Fermo for himself."

There was a moment of silence. Borgia's pale face grew livid; he controlled himself with an effort, and muttered a few words above his breath.

"The story," said the Spaniard, "is briefly told. Oliverotto had obtained leave of his uncle Fogliani to bring with him a squadron of troopers on the occasion of his visit to Fermo. He had not been there for ten years, not since he left, a stripling of twenty and the favorite pupil of Vitellozzo, and it was a humor with him to return with something of the pomp of arms. It was to be the occasion of a festival; the people felt as proud and happy as he. I was not among those called to attend him, but went after with a dispatch from Vitellozzo. A guard was at the gate, and would let none pass;

I asked what was amiss, and two of them laughed —they had all been drinking—and said, 'We have a Duke of our own, now.' I started at that, and one continued, 'Yes, and I was present and saw it all; nay, if you will, look at the blade of my rapier'—and he drew it half from the scabbard, and showed the stain of fresh blood. And again I asked what he meant, and he answered: 'They were feasting when Oliverotto gave the signal we awaited;—the old man made no resistance—he seemed dazed beyond word or motion as Oliverotto cut him down—and the rest of our corps has been sent for and will be here at midnight."

"And the dispatch?" asked Borgia.

De Castro laid it before him.

Cesare tore the enclosure open—it conveyed to Oliverotto the intelligence of Vitelozzo's seizure of Arezzo, showing that the two, master and pupil, had struck in concert.

The news from Fermo travelled to the army cantoned around Borgo San Sepolcro. Vitellozzo heard of the accomplishment of this *coup* with grim indifference. The Orsini would have been more interested, but for the intelligence of the march of Langres with a column which report numbered at seven thousand men. The next morning it was found that Candale, followed by fifteen hundred horse and foot, had vanished. Vitellozzo

alone, his possession of Arezzo threatened, sprang from supineness to reckless counsels. He urged a forced march in the direction of Florence; if the French had arrived, they would be eager to fight; were they still at a distance, the town could be taken and plundered. In this project the Medici, having much to win and nothing to lose, joined heartily.

The answer of the Orsini was conclusive: they refused to proceed further with an expedition that exposed them to such perilous emergencies, and in which their commander left them to shift for themselves. They further declared their intention of hastening across the Apennines, while time remained to retreat. Vitellozzo, in his chagrin, vowed he would cause his troops to fire upon the first company that moved. And thereupon, in their alarm at the general collapse, the Medicean exiles gathered their effects, and sped off without a further word.

Towards midnight, the two lords of Perugia and Siena, with their followers, equipped for departure, sought Vitellozzo. This officer had passed a cheerless evening filled with consternation at his predicament between King Louis and Borgia. The hours had dragged wearily, each marked by the dropping of an iron nail, which, as the flame of the candle reached it, fell from the wax in which it had been inserted. He took up a volume from the table, a

printed book, and therefore a rarity, the gift of Pagolo Orsini, and mechanically turned the pages. It was a treatise by the famous Venetian general, Pitigliano. There was a chapter on the defence of towns, another on vedettes, some algebraic equations applied to the range of artillery, a comparison of the phalanxes of Swiss and Spanish foot, through all of which would come another line of thought—an intrusive legion of forebodings till a servant tapped, and Vitellozzo sprang startled to his feet, as though already summoned by Borgia and the French.

Baglioni and Petrucci were immediately introduced. Vitellozzo greeted them pleasantly:

"You are going hence," he said, "and more courteous than others, have delayed to bid me farewell."

"Even so," answered Petrucci, "and a word more—are your walls secure, is it safe to speak?"

"The walls are deaf, and I will bolt the entrance of the anteroom, then you may talk whatever treason you will," and Il Cignale laughed sardonically. He returned in a moment, pointed to a side table on which stood wine, saying:

"It is well to warm the blood against the night air, and if you have sad words, a cup may soften them."

Then said Petrucci: "We would not choose our words to be more sombre than our situation. Our

conclusion is that if you at Città di Castello are engulfed, we shall fare likewise. Therefore our interest is to sustain you. But you must retire from Arezzo, and place yourself and your battalions at the command of the French general."

"What worse than that can happen?" groaned Vitellozzo.

"In that case the peril of French attack is averted; then will be the opportunity to learn how we all stand towards Borgia. You will hardly pretend to have advanced in his favor. As for Oliverotto, 'tis a bold man that covets his place. The Medici say that not only they, but also Pagolo Orsini had letters from Florence, and when Cesare hears that——"

"The saints preserve him!" ejaculated Baglioni.

"You may need the saints as well as another," answered Vitellozzo; "what does this lead to but that we are all compromised in a greater or less degree?"

"We are all compromised," assented Petrucci, "and therefore it is our life that we stand together. To be more definite I should have to guess events, and to know how others incline. Cannot we come together with Oliverotto and the Orsini and determine some mutual course?"

"Yes," said Vitellozzo, "I will come. The Orsini have been half hearted, and abandon me to-

morrow, but we may have grievous need of one another hereafter."

His visitors rose satisfied with the result of their conference, and from Vitellozzo's reassured tone as they parted, it was evident that he too regarded their interview with contentment.

On the morrow Vitellozzo rode alone to where Pagolo and Gravina, mounted and armed, were watching their troops form for the march. He rode to the elder of the brothers, and said:

"Pagolo, we have been comrades too long to quarrel. Forgive whatever I have said amiss; it was chagrin that overbalanced me. I am come to bid you safe journey, and to own that I am reconciled to abandon Arezzo. Before we part, I warn you from an overpowering presentiment—beware of Cesare Borgia."

"Vitellozzo," answered Orsini, "your nerves have been unstrung. I thank you none the less. You shall never call on me in vain!"

Half an hour later the Orsini vanished down the road, and the line of their pikemen went glittering away; the morning sunlight tipped their spear-heads and came streaming over the housetops of the town they had forsaken, while Vitellozzo remained standing where they had left him. At length he turned with an unwonted moisture in his eyes—"Arezzo," he murmured—"oh Arezzo."

CHAPTER X.

DIPLOMACY.

DON MICHELE acquitted himself with such adroitness in his mission to Milan, that not only was the desired audience accorded to Valentino, but so considerable a change was effected in the disposition of Cardinal Amboise, that an order was dispatched to de Langres countermanding that officer's march. Cesare received this answer with an emotion of relief; the rest, he thought, was easy.

His journey was not without risk, and he undertook it in disguise, and attended only by two valets and three well-appointed troopers. To Ramiro he committed Romagna; to Michelotto he intrusted his negotiations with the fractious condottieri, remarking with an approach to exultation —"In three weeks I shall be here with a French army." And so he rode away northward, passing through the dominion of his new brother-in-law to make a hasty visit to his sister.

At the moment of Cesare's arrival at Ferrara, Lucretia was at the summer palace of Belfiore: his coming was a surprise, and, strange though it appear, a pleasure.

"To-day," writes Secretary Castellus, . . . "her highness diverted herself for a couple of hours in pleasant converse with the Duke of Romagna, which put her in great good spirits." There was good news to talk of. Cesare had added to his possessions, and if a storm gathered, he anticipated its termination to his advantage. Their correspondence had kept them mutually informed of facts and events, but it was a sympathetic satisfaction to dwell upon the particulars of his recent triumphs. To the moral obtuseness of the time, the story of the slaying of men was as the record of a hunt, or of the master-stroke in some hard-contested game.

Lucretia's was a gentler tale: she could laugh yet at the recollection of her meeting with the old duke, when he presented his natural brother, and then a natural daughter, and then the three natural daughters of Sigismund d'Este—a battalion of illegitimates to bid her welcome. She had much to tell, fêtes and dances at the palace, and the sports and games for the townsfolk that Ercole and his master of ceremonies had prepared; of the curious gift of the Venetian envoys, who, after reading an address, had presented their long cloaks, much to the merriment of all Ferrara; of the verses composed by a youthful poet named Ariosto. They chatted thus until time compelled Cesare to resume his journey, courteously attended

to the frontier by Lucretia's husband. Only a slight acquaintance had heretofore existed between them, and Alfonzo eyed with curiosity this self-created prince—urbane, successful, red-handed; but Cesare's appearance was of ominous suggestion, and it was with a contentment as full as his regretful words of parting were suave that he saw the Duke of Romagna resume his route to Milan.

At Cremona appeared the first French troops—familiar enough to Valentino; at Lodi, upon seeing the safe-conduct which Michelotto had brought back, an officer joined his little company to prevent the annoyance of stoppages at the successive outposts. Nearing the outskirts of Milan towards the close of a long summer's day, every distressful sign of conquest was present in the deserted country houses, the uncultivated fields, the road forsaken save by a few French officers enjoying the cool of the afternoon. At the gate was a platoon of Swiss on guard, sturdy, beef-eating peasants, whose captain, despite the French officer's protest, halted the party, and obliged Valentino to exhibit his papers.

"We take orders only from our own commanders," retorted the Swiss. Then seeing the name and the signature of d'Aubigny, he motioned them to advance.

"These fellows grow more insufferable every

day," grumbled the officer, whose dignity had been thus slighted.

"I wonder that you employ them," observed Cesare; "your army is not considered to need auxiliaries."

His companion caught a tinge of irony in the accent, but the earnest face at his side was seriously placid.

"Were we to dismiss them now," he answered, "they would take service with I know not whom, and we might see five thousand men added to the ranks of our enemies."

They rode through narrow streets, all guiltless of sidewalks, paved with cobble stones and irregular slabs, and with an odorous gutter flowing down the middle. On either side were colonnades, projecting beams, fantastic iron work, lofty roofs and gables, and pious inscriptions on the walls. In turning a corner, Cesare caught a glimpse of the lower fabric of the Duomo, then in construction.

"Is work upon the Cathedral interrupted?" he asked.

"Yes; we have sent to Paris for one of our architects."

They entered the enclosure of the palace where the King and Cardinal Amboise lodged, and to which the duke had been bidden. A company of arquebusiers was quartered in the court-yard, and here and there moved officers or courtiers, attend-

ants and pages of the royal retinue. Beside an iron fountain leaned a group of blue and yellow and white clad peasant women, with copper buckets balanced beneath the crystal jets. Cesare was received by the cardinal's clerical secretary, and by a gentleman of the King, who conducted him up a flight of steps.

"Monseigneur will be indulgent," remarked the ecclesiastic, leading the way; "we are here as in a barrack."

"One must needs be patient campaigning," added the equerry, rubbing his hands subserviently; "the King commanded that you be entertained here that he might know you near him."

"And when will his Eminence deign to receive me?" asked Cesare, not caring had he been housed in an attic, so opportunity were given for the business which brought him.

"This very evening; he was impatient for tidings of your coming, and while you are shaking off the dust of the way, I will acquaint him with your arrival."

Cesare was now left with his valets and his saddle-bags. An hour later the secretary returned. The duke had meanwhile habited himself, and received with satisfaction the intimation that Cardinal Amboise awaited him.

The eminent minister of King Louis was, like his master, still in the prime of vigorous manhood.

Trained in the schools of French, Spanish, and Italian diplomacy, he had early made his way to favor. Bold, supple, unscrupulous, he had for six years conducted the affairs of France, and had acquired immense ascendency over both monarch and palace. Chiefly he owed advancement to fidelity to the King during unfortunate conflicts of that prince's earlier years. Avarice was the basis of his character: the present Italian war had opened precious opportunities for personal profit, and it was with warm satisfaction that he learned of the advent of the opulent briber. His one extravagance was in the pleasures of the table. Habited on this afternoon in the robes of his office, he sat before a portfolio of maps of the Italian states, which d'Aubigny had brought for the illustration of his views upon the impending war with Spain. He rose from his work and greeted the duke with friendly cordiality, for they were old acquaintance.

"Young and handsome as ever," he began, shaking his visitor by the hand and bidding him be seated: "grown a trifle more robust since we supped together in Paris—do you remember those Normandy pheasants? But years have not brought you discretion; how much mischief you have made with your condottieri."

"In truth," answered Cesare, reflecting the cardinal's amiable mood, "it is unwittingly that I have troubled the peace; it is this I have come to

explain to my royal cousin and to your Eminence, and we shall fasten the blame where it is due."

"Henceforth you must hold such overzealous lieutenants in leash," observed the cardinal; "here are Florence and Venice both clamoring, and what would be your condition were it not for the favor of the King!"

"The favor of Cardinal Amboise is sufficient; is the King sincere in these threatening messages?"

"You put him in a passion at your doings on the Tuscan frontier, and you will find him sore enough yet: could you not understand that to harry his ally is an open contempt of him?"

"And who could divine your alliance with Florence when the Florentines stand in such dread of you that they quake at sight of the courier from Milan? But enough; 'tis a misunderstanding, and upon your Eminence I depend to soften the shadows; unless," he added, slowly, "you have no longer need of me between here and Capua."

The cardinal's severe eyes softened at these words, which recalled d'Aubigny's exposition of the need of security for their long line of operations between Lombardy and the Sicilies; "Florence," the general had said, "is too weak to help or to hinder. The Borgia's eight thousand soldiers can make our rear secure, or place us in peril after we are hundreds of miles from our strongholds in a semi-hostile country, with the Spaniards in front."

"And apropos of the affairs we have to talk of," pursued Valentino, "I have to crave pardon that my usual contributions have not been paid; it is my treasurer's omission, the amount is here—fifteen thousand sequins. It shall be delivered within the hour, only be it between ourselves, or Louis will be dunning me for more."

No such contribution had ever been paid, but this was a way of tendering the inevitable bribe, and the ecclesiastic showed satisfaction in his face if not altogether in his words.

"Fifteen thousand!" he cried, "methought twenty was the full total; well, well, perhaps you are right; you are assuredly wise to pay it to me, else how speedily would it be squandered;—a very apt and discreet youth;—I will see the King, there shall be no difficulty . . . fifteen thousand in an hour."

"On the instant, provided I have your leave to withdraw and bring Levy's bills from my room."

"Sainte Marie! you have not left bills for fifteen thousand sequins in your room! Nay haste fetch me them, and we will sup together presently, I have some terrines from Strassburg; the only thing fit to eat that Germany produces; but haste, careless youth," and in his impatience Amboise pushed the duke out of the door, where he remained watching his return.

At noon on the following day, Valentino was in-

terrupted in his chat with d'Aubigny and the Prevost by a message that the King awaited him. His relations with his royal brother-in-law had not always been serene, and unless Amboise had soothed his majesty's temper, the Italian had the prospect of an unpleasant hour.

Life till latterly had dealt hardly with Louis the Twelfth of France. During the reign of his predecessor, he had placed himself at the head of malcontent factions, and had experienced exile and imprisonment, through which the faithful Amboise had remained constant. If not possessed of superior mind or spirit, he had acquired a varied experience of the world, adroitness in affairs, and discrimination among men. No sooner established on the throne than he prepared for the assertion of his right to the duchy of Milan, a claim founded upon the visionary title of Valentine Visconti, heiress of the dispossessed family of that name. Abandoned by his timid subjects, and betrayed by his Swiss, Ludovico Sforza, Duke of Milan, fell a prey to the invader, and Lombardy passed under the sovereignty of France. The campaign for the recovery of the lost conquest of Naples had been followed by such machinations in Northern Italy as had detained there a considerable portion of the French army.

The King's most noteworthy experience with the Borgias was on the occasion of his divorce from a

daughter of Louis XI., and of his marriage with the widow of Charles VIII. In consideration of the Duchy of Valentinois and the loan of some troops to Cesare—recently relieved from holy orders and from a cardinal become a soldier duke—the Pope was prevailed upon to grant the necessary dispensation, and Cesare was sent with it to Paris. On arriving he announced to the monarch's disgust merely the probable issuing of the coveted decree, and meanwhile sought to make a more profitable bargain than the Pope had stipulated. To his discomfiture the King suddenly threw aside negotiation and prepared for immediate union with the beautiful Anne of Brittany. It was disclosed some hours after that a certain Cardinal Cette had sought the sovereign in his embarrassment and had pointed a way out of the dilemma. "I have sure knowledge," he explained, "that the dispensation is signed and issued and is in the duke's possession. Whether it be delivered to you or destroyed matters not; it cannot be recalled; you are divorced already and are free to marry." It was an odd coincidence that Cardinal Cette died a fortnight after.

But for the moment Cesare was vanquished; there was no alternative but an admission of defeat, and the production of the Pope's decree. The marriage was consummated, Cesare received the title of Duc de Valentinois and was aided in

the conquest of Romagna. The man who had outwitted him had still kept to his word.

Louis awaited his visitor in a reception-room which opened from his apartments. He was dressed in an embroidered suit of green cloth slashed at the sleeves, and garnished at the wrists and collar with linen, which being unstarched, was of a limp appearance. About his neck was a reliquary, and at his girdle hung the habitual poniard. His face was clean shaven, his hair worn long at the sides and back of the head, and cut short across the brow. Scattered about were weapons, chiefly fire-arms of the ungainly model of the time, together with travelling equipment, camp baggage, and articles of clothing.

Louis stood at a window absently examining the mechanism of a silver inlaid arquebuse, his fingers playing idly with the lock, and his gaze resting indifferently upon it. He laid it down as the door opened to admit Valentino and the pages escorting him. The two met with an assumption of friendliness. Louis shook Cesare by the hand, peered into his face with his keen brown eyes, smiled rather sourly and motioned to a couple of chairs; then, suddenly changing his mind, said:

"My cousin, follow me into my private study, where we shall converse without listeners or interruption."

"Sire," exclaimed Cesare, "I cannot be seated

until I hear from your lips of the health of my beloved spouse."

A merry twinkle lighted up the King's eyes ere he answered:

"Charlotte is well in all but the excessive retirement of her life, which displeases me."

"And," pursued Cesare, following towards the inner room, "can no persuasion prevail upon her to revisit Italy?"

"Nay," replied the king, "we do not talk of that; it were waste of breath."

Cesare now found himself in an apartment which served the King as *cabinet de travail.* Like the outer chamber, it was strewn with objects of every description. If it be true that the aspect of a familiar room is a reflex of the mind of its occupant, suggesting his tastes and habits, and to a keen observer, much more, then Louis' ideas must have been in some disorder.

"Be seated," began the King, indicating a chair, and throwing himself upon an imitation of a Turkish divan, "and tell me how you fare and what news from Rome, and how does the golden-haired Lucretia?"

"My father is well, and my sister I saw three days since at Ferrara; she sent you her duty and many messages."

Louis listened with *distrait* attention, and as Cesare finished said abruptly:

"What a plague you have stirred up for me, as if I had not trouble enough in this accursed country."

"I follow your majesty's example," answered Borgia, "and take what I can get."

A sudden flush and threatening frown took the place on Louis' countenance of the good-natured indifference of a moment before. Ere he could utter the angry words that flew to his lips, Cesare interposed.

"I have come here," he said quickly, "to offer the utmost atonement for an unintended fault; it is by placing myself and my army at your disposal."

"*Myself and my army*, sounds well," replied the King, with sarcastic inflection; "but in the past you have deceived me, and now we hear that your boasted army is not to be bitted or bridled."

"If such be seriously your sentiments towards me, and your opinion of my troops, it were idle to pledge myself, or to offer my men. At best it were a sorry post to stand betwixt the heavy blows of your impending settlements with Spain."

"Tush!" ejaculated Louis, "by Saint Jacques, what a fretful youth it is. Hast thou not learned that the men who accomplish most are those who lose their temper least?"

"Let us leave these subjects, sire, that irritate to no purpose. Give me leave to say rather that

I have brought you two brace of falcons from the Roman Campania, which——"

"The devil fly your falcons!" retorted the King; "we have serious things to talk about; I am willing to listen to the proposition you have come here to make. I am willing to look at our situation with you, and to speak frankly as to a friend."

"Sire, I am come to listen and to obey."

"First, then, we are evidently in a position to do one another some mischief, not to say more. On the other hand, we might each render the other an invaluable service; it remains to be seen in which course lies the greater profit."

"Profit for you?" queried Valentino.

"Nay, in good faith for both. It is strongly suspected that you would not be the worse for a vigorous helping hand."

"There falls on me the shadow of a difference among my captains, or between them and me, on the very ground for which you censure."

Louis observed the young man with a curiously comical look.

"You mean," he said, "that you did not order the taking of Arezzo?"

At this inquiry Borgia good-humoredly laughed aloud.

"Arezzo, in itself," he said, "was not worth capture; and had it been the prelude to some seri-

ous enterprise, think you I would have been wanting at the head of my soldiers?"

The King listened while he toyed with a tassel that depended from the arm of his chair; then dropping it with sudden impatience, he exclaimed: "Cannot you understand that truth is the best diplomacy between those who are to serve one another! Let us be frank if this meeting is not to be a mere exchange of words. Let us leave what is past, your—follies shall I call them?—at Arezzo and Urbino and Camerino. Let us look at the present and the future," he said, rising from his *poltrone* and walking slowly up and down the room, "our aims, our resources, our difficulties."

"I am resolved," pursued the King, halting before his visitor and swinging a bunch of small keys that hung from his girdle—

"I am resolved to keep Milan, come what may. With this I should be satisfied, but the army calls for a continuance of the Neapolitan occupation. It is evident that we cannot remain there permanently, yet we cannot abandon the Sicilies to the Spaniard by an abrupt retreat."

"Neither can you enter Naples again without first breaking the ranks of the Spanish pikemen; they are not Swiss to be bought."

"And therefore if a passage at arms should result from military demonstrations which the balance in the Peninsula makes necessary, it might be

useful to have an ally in the centre of Italy whose fortresses and stores would be so much vantage gained upon the enemy."

"Say indispensable rather than useful."

"A question of degree, if you will," assented the King with a little wave of the hand habitual to him; "but a question dependent upon how much that friend can do, and how much of his engagement will be fulfilled."

"You can determine those points by making your success as valuable to your auxiliary as to yourself. Self-interest and the fear of consequences are motives that never fail."

Louis listened with a cunning grimace as he drew from his pocket a gold box filled with brown dust of which he applied a pinch to his nostrils. He tendered the box to the duke, who eyed it suspiciously and shook his forefinger in that negative gesture familiar to the modern Italian.

"It looks like mother earth, eh?" pursued the King; "you have never seen it before? 'Tis a product of the new Indies beyond the sea, and given me by a ship captain whose life I spared last winter, and who said he possessed something worthy to be offered to a King, something the odor of which clears and composes the brain and lengthens the mental vision."

A blast of martial music interrupted their discourse. The King strode to the open window and

motioned Cesare to his side in the deep casement. It was the regiment called *Auvergne*, led by a cluster of brilliantly attired officers returning from review on the Piazza d'Armi, a broad stretch before Francesco Sforza's citadel, which stands to this day almost as he left it four centuries ago.

A bevy of girls in the street below stopped their feminine chatter to look as the long column of sturdy men at arms went by, the heavy silken banners drooping at intervals along the line, the sunlight caught by many a casque or halberd blade, the music growing faint in the distance. A gleam of exultation passed over the King's face. "Tell me," he said, "what ally needs he who has such dauntless friends at his back?"

"So asks de Cordova when the yellow clad regiments of Castile defile before him in his Neapolitan camps," rejoined Borgia.

The King's expression clouded; then jeeringly he said, "It is less with Spain than with princelings like yourself or with decrepit Republics such as Genoa and Florence that I have to do."

"Ah!" ejaculated the other with a sneering assumption of surprise—"abandon the acquisition of your predecessor—the Italian pearl in the French crown! Nay, if you come with such pacific intentions, it was unnecessary to bring all those fine soldiers merely to threaten the weak."

"Threaten, say you—par St. Denis!" cried

Louis angrily, "know you that I have five thousand men on your Tuscan frontier ——"

"About to march against my captains in Romagna; against troops their equal in mettle and double their number. Believe me, the result could not have been auspicious as the first page of your struggle with Spain. Think you that the day you wrest Romagna from me I will not withdraw to the defiles of the Abruzzi and stand there against you as the vanguard of de Cordova's army?"

"I should have moved without giving you time to withdraw, had not the certitude of an amicable settlement prevailed over my confidence in the superiority of my troops."

"Your belief in an amicable settlement is so strong that you are at this moment awaiting reinforcements of which I can give you the latest news. You await the arrival of a corps led by the Constable of Occan, composed of two hundred knights, a thousand archers, and three thousand halberdiers—all at latest accounts en route to the Alps from Grenoble."

The King gazed at him with a stare of blank surprise.

"It will be glad news for Italy," continued the duke, "when your Majesty makes known his preference for negotiation over arms. It would be no ordinary contest, no tilt to decide the line of a frontier or the possession of a town—but a strug-

gle to determine supremacy from here to Palermo; preponderance with the Church; power and prestige even beyond the Emperor's."

There was a moment's pause ere the King answered,

"You are well informed, but in part you are mistaken; listen, I will tell you a secret—I leave for Paris in twenty days."

Cesare scanned the King's face intently, seemed satisfied with its sincerity, and dropping back astonished in his chair, said,

"You forsake the fateful days of your life—for some woman—the Queen of course," he added under his breath.

"I shall return in time."

"For yourself, yes; but not in time for me."

"You are sore pressed by your faithful army?"

"If I am to be of use to you hereafter, you must help me at once. Lend me a few thousand men, and you shall have them back when you return."

To this proposition had Louis desired to lead his astute guest, the balance in its favor having been determined by the cardinal's opinion.

"What use is to be made of my soldiers?" he asked with seeming hesitation.

"Sire, my cousin," answered Cesare, "the life to which I aspire divides itself into two parts. The second will commence at my father's death, which, when it happens, will find me prepared, so far as

human foresight can make ready, for every event. But I am yet in the first period, and what is urgent is the completion of the task to begin which you lent me Ives d'Allégre."

"Your province will suffer an indigestion if it absorb too much—Florence, for instance."

"It is difficult to be explicit where so many contingencies may arise."

"But you will give me back my regiments decimated, if you fling them at every rampart."

"I will pay a purse of gold for every man killed."

"And should I later have a disagreement with de Cordova?"

"I will stand as your buttress against the Spaniard, ready to open you a broad avenue of approach when you seek him on the Volturno."

"You shall give me a hostage for this."

"You shall have the Pope himself."

"I expect a war contribution."

"Whatever sum named shall be paid."

"And supplies for my troops at points on the route," pursued the King, finding his visitor so complaisant.

"They shall be fattened for—the slaughter," answered Cesare with a laugh.

"And stay; my beloved spouse is building an oratory; find me a pair of alabaster pillars; upon these conditions you shall have Langres' corps for a couple of months. And now farewell; you must

be tired—no?—remember you sup with me this evening; till then adieu; all is now understood and agreed between us, is it not?"

Cesare Borgia in that instant beheld the realization of his utmost wish; his turbulent lieutenants humbled; Florence at his feet: central Italy welded for him into the largest and strongest state in the Peninsula—and he took the hand the King extended, kissed it, and answered impassively, "Sire, my cousin, it is so agreed between us."

CHAPTER XI.

MAGIONE.

THE Castle of Magione, near Lake Thrasimene, was one of the strongest fiefs of the Orsini, and to it, in the moment of alarm, had the condottieri generals, and two or three who shared their danger, been summoned for the council which Pandolfo Petrucci proposed.

It has suffered little change in outward appearance. Only the defences of the gateway are gone, the cortile has been modernized, and the chambers and broad balconies around it are dismantled. It is a quadrangular enclosure with four tall and massive towers, beside one of which is a hall designated by tradition as that in which the barons met.

Towards the close of the last day of September, 1502, Cardinal Orsini and Giovanni Baglioni set out from Perugia and rode away in the liquid yellow of the twilight towards the great pines that stood motionless upon the northern horizon.

At Magione, Pagolo and Francesco Orsini awaited —the secrecy which that age so well understood was pledged by all, and every precaution of vedettes

concealed without and of sentinels within the castle had been observed.

The first to appear was Oliverotto, who now styled himself "da Fermo." Vitellozzo presented himself soon after; at ten o'clock came Petrucci, who had been ferried across the lake, and had walked, portly and breathless, up the hillside. Half an hour later Cardinal Orsini and Baglioni approached from Perugia, and all having now arrived, the gate was closed and a repast of frittura of fish, followed by cold meats, with a damigiana of red wine, was served in the refectory.

The common danger made all equals, but it likewise produced a taciturn constraint; moreover, Baglioni detested Vitellozzo; Petrucci had never met the plebeian Oliverotto; while Vitellozzo, suspecting Cardinal Orsini of designs upon Città di Castello, addressed him as *Eminentissimo ben venuto* with poorly dissembled ill-will. They were served by a single servant, of whom Pagolo remarked he was more trusty than his betters. Oliverotto eat in silence with affected nonchalance; Vitellozzo sipped a little wine, and then, resting both arms on the table, listened indifferently to the gossip with which the cardinal sought to pass away the minutes.

Pagolo took advantage of a pause to remark upon the fatigue which those of his guests who had ridden from a distance must experience, and

to suggest that nothing profitable could be determined that night.

"Let me commend you to refreshing sleep," he concluded; "the morning's refection will be served in your chambers, and at noon we will assemble here."

Baglioni waited to talk with Gravina; Pagolo and Petrucci escorted the cardinal to his door, while Vitellozzo and Oliverotto lingered on the stair.

"You have been more favored than I," observed the former.

"Yes," answered Oliverotto with the accent of a man haunted rather by some unwelcome remembrance than encouraged by a memory of triumph. "The stroke succeeded; for six years have I borne it in my thoughts, and often seen it distorted in dreams; but now that it appears no longer as a purpose, but only as an afterthought, I grow weary of it by day, and by night it hinders my slumber."

"Bah!" ejaculated Vitellozzo, "you sacrifice but scantily to fortune, if such be your thanks. I too carried a project from my youth and beheld its realization torn from me. And now the Orsini distrust me, the Florentines hate me, and Borgia——"

"Hist," whispered his companion, "here comes Pagolo to bid us to our cells."

The morning of the first of October, 1502, opened cold and damp, and after one faint effort to pierce the clouds, the sun disappeared and the rain fell

steadily. A mist gathered on the hillside, concealing Lake Thrasimene, while the features of adjacent slopes and summits remained undistinguishable. Within, those who had arrived the night before lay late abed, with no motive to set them afoot, and nothing to think of but the impending conference which each was conscious would be accounted treason. Should they fail to come in accord, and ever pass within the scope of vengeance, how slight must be their hope of escape or mercy. This reflection put them into as conciliatory a mood towards one another as was possible for designing and relentless men.

The room wherein they assembled was such as is found in every mediæval castle, with red-tiled floor, carved chairs covered with fox-skins, a press at one end, a settle at the other, a dining table in the centre with a wooden bread rack suspended above it, and groupings of weapons and armor on the walls; projecting into the room was a huge fireplace, in which were often grilled and roasted, before the eyes of the hungry feasters, the meats of their repast; along the sloping mantel were drinking vessels, while on the wall hung two pictures from the hand of Leonardo da Vinci, then rising to fame. On a shutter at a southern window, between lattices of straw matting, was a fantastically colored sun-dial, and beneath in old Italian the inscription:

I mark but the shining hours,

The superstitious Petrucci noted the words and its signless front as of ill omen, accentuated by the boding aspect of a cat which crouched in the window and fixed its great green eyes upon him. On the opposite panel, in monkish Latin, was the inscription:

The three chief misfortunes: childhood without parents; manhood without love; age without money.

"Who have we in the room adjoining mine that lies so ill?" asked Baglioni of Pagolo Orsini.

"An old monk brought in two days since, weak, hungry, suffering, half dying; our capellano took compassion and gave him food and lodging for a few days: we had to despatch our riverente on a journey before this rendezvous, so the stranger is left to shift pretty much for himself, which he does by sleeping—at least he has been in a doze whenever my brother or I peeped in. He is safe under lock and bolt, never fear."

Petrucci approached Cardinal Orsini.

"How fares your Eminence to-day?" he courteously inquired.

"Ill, sorely ill," answered the cardinal, raising his hand to his cheek; "toothache all night—this wet weather makes it worse. Teeth are the greatest curse with which nature plagues us: through life they are at the mercy of every roving leech, and in old age the few that have escaped the pincers drop out or split the head with pain."

"Know you that there is a battle-field yonder where Hannibal routed the legionaries of the Consul Flaminius?" asked Baglioni of Gravina.

"I must have ridden across it while falconing, but 'tis impossible to identify the spot."

"I have always believed," said Cardinal Orsini, joining them, "that the Roman defeats were due to the absurd shortness of the sword. The Gauls of Brennus, the Germans under Arminius, the Carthaginians led by Hannibal, all used long swords, and all vanquished the Romans with their thick, little blades."

"Then why did not the Romans lengthen their weapons?"

"Because the soldiers of Marius and Cunctator preferred death to owning a mistake."

They seated themselves around the table, and a silence followed which was broken by the cardinal.

"Methinks," he said, "that we have separate things to consider which should be treated in succession; some have suffered wrongs, some stand in present danger, all are concerned for the future. Shall we take them in this order?"

Petrucci and Baglioni nodded approval, and Vitellozzo said:

"Mine is the grief and the danger. I have lost Arezzo, Borgia has sold my life against the favor of the French—how can I resist singly?"

"But you are not alone," answered Petrucci; "I

for one will stand with you since in your fall I see my own. Valentino, whom you have followed to your misfortune, proposed to Florence an alliance, provided he were allowed to take Siena and——"

"And I," interrupted Baglioni, "stand in similar peril. It comes to me from the Vatican, through sources not to be denied, that Perugia is viewed as the link to cement Romagna with Rome. I have only eight hundred trained men, but the people cast their lot with me, and I, like Petrucci, dare not let you perish; but on your side, you shall pledge to maintain us."

"I, too, enter that compact," said Oliverotto. "Secure me Fermo, and I promise two thousand men."

"Four of us of one mind already," ejaculated Petrucci; "the Orsini only have not spoken," he added, with a glance at the cardinal, who in answer to this challenge, and speaking with more measure than was usual to his fluent discourse, said:

"I answer for myself, and for one not here—Guidobaldo of Urbino. That some of us are ready to stand by one another for self-interest's sake is obvious. There is a wider reach that holds all that is most important. Our peril is not to be dissembled. Were it not wise, think you, to reduce the danger by diminishing the force which threatens; to strike at the same time that we gather side by side, to seize the opportunities of surprise, to smite

the wolf in the fangs by restoring his possessions to the lord of Urbino?"

So bold a proposition was received in silence. Presently Pagolo answered:

"To join for mutual protection is one thing; to assail Borgia on his own ground is to double the hazard."

"There can be no half measures," broke in Gravina; "this meeting alone severs our fealty; we shall inevitably be destroyed unless we deal a crippling blow at the outset."

"A 'crippling blow' is easily said," retorted Vitellozzo, "but suppose Cesare comes back from Milan with a French army!"

This seemed an unanswerable suggestion, but the ready cardinal took up the thread again, and, modifying his discourse, resumed:

"But you have not allowed me to finish; I was going on to say there is a middle course which the Venetian ambassador proposed to me. Suppose Guidobaldo presents himself at Urbino, you can let him enrol a few hundred of your men as his own; the people will rise against the garrison, which is not a strong one, and the loss of the place would be so severe a stroke that Borgia would be disposed to accept our terms."

"That may do if we deal with him alone, but you evade the contingency of his bringing an army from Milan."

"There is such a thing as bestowing too much importance upon the French; if Venice were but clear of the Turks, the French could not maintain themselves this side the Alps."

"That, however, is merely an 'if;' we need look for nothing from the Venetians but their detestation of the French and their dislike for Borgia."

"Suppose," said Pagolo Orsini, "that we cast up our resources and see what army we could put in the field. I have two thousand five hundred men."

"And I," added Gravina, "have twenty-three hundred."

"I can spare fifteen hundred from Fermo," remarked Oliverotto.

"And I a thousand from Città di Castello," said Vitellozzo.

"Only a thousand—only fifteen hundred," cried Baglioni, who was keeping count. "Your corps have shrivelled like birds shrunk to grasshoppers. I should never have feared you, Vitellozzo, had I known your band so scanty."

"You had three thousand at Arezzo," interposed Gravina, "and lost not fifty men in the campaign."

"You can bring more than a thousand," remonstrated Petrucci; "even I will bring that many, though in doing so I leave Siena defenceless."

"Well," answered Vitellozzo, doggedly, "my strength shall equal Oliverotto's."

"And adding five hundred of mine," resumed

Baglioni, "makes a total of nine thousand three hundred. Who can tell what force of Valentino's remains in Romagna?"

The speaker addressed this inquiry to Pagolo Orsini, who replied,

"The garrisons of Camerino, Urbino, Pesaro, Forlì, and Faenza, taken together, cannot be more than one thousand men. Candale has a thousand. At Imola there is a training camp which Michelotto commands. I have heard him speak of the force gathered there as fifteen hundred men."

"More than that. Ramiro d'Orco told me last May that two thousand men were in the ranks, and they must have increased since then."

"At most four thousand five hundred, to our nine thousand three hundred," ejaculated Petrucci; "ours all available for the field, and one-fourth part of his chained to a string of towns."

"We cannot fail if we strike swiftly," exclaimed Gravina.

"Even if he lead a division of French," assented Oliverotto.

"You have satisfied us," said Petrucci, addressing himself to the cardinal, "that Venice is not in condition to render us aid; think you something may be looked for from Florence?"

"You should be the best to answer that question," replied the cardinal.

"If such be the opinion of your Eminence, I

will say something of an interview I had ten days since with Niccolo Machiavelli, whom I went to see in his house beside the Ponte Vecchio."

The auditory listened to this announcement with interest, and the cat, walking to Pagolo's side, looked up in his face, then turning, fixed its eyes intently upon the only door giving access to the room.

"I told him some of us had disapproved the attack on Arezzo; that none of Borgia's captains desired a collision with Florence, knowing it must presently bring them in conflict with the arms of France."

"A plague on the arms of France," cried Gravina, angrily.

"I added that after the affairs of Camerino and Urbino not one of us felt safe, and he laughed and said, 'It takes a brave man to dare be Borgia's servant.' Then I asked if Florence would make a league with us, to which he answered, '*On which side will be the French?*' and though I spent an hour trying to convince him that King Louis and Valentino were now embroiled, I could not get a word further than this in one shape or another: '*Show me first which way will be the French.*'"

"Your investigation has chiefly shown, then, that Machiavelli is a man of doubt," observed the cardinal.

"Could not his uncertainty have been determined by a fat purse?" asked Baglioni.

"You little know him," answered Petrucci; "he is the purest man in Italy."

"Then," asked Oliverotto, impatiently, "to what purpose was your visit?"

"My conversation with him," continued Petrucci, studiously avoiding addressing himself to Oliverotto, "satisfied me that should France remain neutral, we may expect a couple of thousand Tuscans to aid us by way of retaliation for Borgia's attack upon Arezzo."

"What a pity we have no news from Milan," ejaculated Baglioni.

"It is comical," observed the cardinal, with a chuckle, "that I, who am an old man, and come from far, should discover what you young knights near by have groped for in vain."

"What have you discovered?" cried Vitellozzo, eagerly.

"That Valentino offered King Louis gold without count and the support of his arms in return for aid; that in reply the King reproached him with ill treatment of his wife, overwhelmed him with proofs of bad faith at Arezzo, and refused more than a regiment of Swiss."

A murmur of surprise went round, and more than one face beamed with exultation.

"How came you by this information?" asked the mistrustful Petrucci.

"I learned it through Cardinal Corneto, who

stole Cesare's despatch to the Pope from among his Holiness's private papers."

"If this be true, Borgia is at our mercy."

"How mean you, if it be true?"

"That the Borgias are not easily caught napping."

"You might have been outspoken, and told us this at once," said Vitellozzo, peevishly; "it half looks like a trick of the old fox."

"I did not tell it until you showed yourselves in earnest and ready to stand together. As for a trick, I tell you the letter was taken from Alexander's private chest; it is the confidential statement of Cesare to his father."

"You have seen this letter?"

"Only a copy."

"Is that copy here?"

"Think you I durst travel with such evidence upon me?"

"I cannot satisfy myself that there is not some pitfall here," objected Petrucci.

"We have had doubts enough," answered Gravina; "let us pass to a decision."

"There are two courses," said Pagolo Orsini; "either to watch events while Guidobaldo tries his teeth on Urbino, or to join him in the attack with one of our columns, while the rest of our force pushes upon Imola."

"A hazardous adventure," commented Baglioni.

"But something must be risked, whatever we do; merely being afraid will neither disarm nor conciliate."

"Be it determined by a vote," quoth the cardinal. "Is it to be the peril of resistance, or the peril of attack, and all shall abide by the decision?"

"Be it so," assented those about him.

"You were first to speak," said the cardinal, addressing Vitellozzo, "will you be first now?"

"For the extreme course—and Arezzo," answered the lord of Città di Castello.

"That is a just claim," threw in Oliverotto. "And I speak for attack—sudden and swift; and you shall hold me harmless at Fermo."

"I agree to what you both have said," spoke up Gravina; "unlike you both, I have nothing to ask."

The words were followed by a pause. Three had spoken for attack, four were yet to declare themselves; one more voice for the initiative, and they stood committed to an immediate struggle with their redoubtable commander.

"Come," cried Oliverotto, scowling about him, "dare you not even confess yourselves afraid, and say—*No.*"

"I accept the omen," exclaimed Pagolo, crossing himself; "my heart speaks for concession; let us arm and stand together, but nothing more."

"So, too, say I," assented the cautious Petrucci; "better the edge, than the bottom of the abyss."

"And with that opinion stand I," spoke Baglioni; "let us arm, but not strike."

"Arm and be struck then," retorted Gravina.

All turned toward Cardinal Orsini, whose word was now to decide the action of all. The ecclesiastic glanced round the circle of eager faces, and his gaze rested upon the anxious countenance of Pagolo. For that brief instant the foreboding of the younger man fell on the elder. Then, with a brusque self-constraint he said:

"I cast my lot for attack. I should be here to small purpose were it for else than to urge you upon the common foe. Be of good cheer, bold hearts, the superior force is yours, the advantage of surprise is yours, yours will be the rich division in place of the peril that spurs to this steep road to safety."

Not till three hours after the meridian did the confederates bring to a close their consultation upon details. The sanguinary decision once taken, the afternoon dragged heavily on, the sound of falling rain continuing without, while within the shadows deepened around the crackling fire. Now and again Gravina paused in his fretful striding up and down, and threw fresh logs across the andirons. Pagolo spoke in monosyllables, while Petrucci and Baglioni listened with reserve to the conclusions successively arrived at.

At length Vitellozzo rose and stretched himself. "We have had care enough," he said; "give us a morsel to eat, Pagolo, and a flagon apiece to warm our blood for the night ride."

"They should have been offered before, but that in resolves such as these one must beware the coward courage of the cup."

So saying, Pagolo left the room to summon his trusted attendant.

"I will not leave to-night in the face of this storm," said Oliverotto, "provided Gravina will let me rest within these walls."

"I shall ride to Città di Castello without drawing rein," exclaimed Vitellozzo, with reproof in his voice.

"I long for Perugia," observed Baglioni.

"And I for Siena," echoed Petrucci; "it is a sign of age that I sleep ill in any bed but my own."

A loud, harsh cry of alarm rang from the stairway.

All recognized the voice of Pagolo.

"Gravina! Vitellozzo!" he shouted, "help, quick! We are betrayed!"

They made their way to him before his words ceased to sound along the wall? Oliverotto, sword in hand, was first at his side.

Pagolo's face had blanched to the hue of leprosy. His hands clutched the arms of those who

gathered about him, his frame quivered with emotion, his voice, after that one effort, had sunk to a husky whisper. He motioned to a half-open door, and Gravina, Vitellozzo and Oliverotto sprang to it, the cardinal, Baglioni and Petrucci following at safe distance.

Gravina threw wide the door of the chamber to which his brother pointed, and all entered. It was the room that had been occupied by the infirm Dominican.

On the floor lay the servant Niccolo dead, a stiletto stab through his heart.

"Merciful powers!" cried the cardinal, horror-struck, "how comes this?"

"The monk that lay here abed——"

"What of him?"

"Has disappeared!"

"After listening to every word!"

"He cannot have escaped; we shall find him hidden somewhere in the castle."

"Look!" exclaimed Gravina, "Niccolo's keys are gone."

"What keys were they?"

"Duplicates opening every lock and door."

Pagolo smote himself in the face with both hands.

"Then he has escaped by the subterranean passage to the lake," he groaned. "It has long been unused, the entrance is hidden—it must have been left unguarded."

"Unguarded!" cried Gravina in amazement; "oh, Pagolo, it is time to die when we leave our castle gates unguarded."

"Nay," said the cardinal, "we know not but that Fabio may have stationed a sentry at its entrance. Arouse the guards, scatter your troopers in pursuit—he may yet be taken."

Baglioni and Petrucci exchanged grim looks as the Orsini, followed by Vitellozzo and Oliverotto, rushed noisily from the room.

"An ominous commencement," muttered Petrucci in his subdued tone.

The other beckoned to him, and together they withdrew.

"Let us go, and quickly," said Baglioni—"let us save ourselves while we may."

CHAPTER XII.

REVOLT.

THE sun was disappearing amid a mass of opalescent clouds. Upon the horizon glowed the rich coloring of October, and nearer, the landscape brightened in places where the foliage tints had mellowed on the mountain sides, and the vines on terraces and garden-walls had crimsoned.

The sunset hues swooned to the grays of twilight as Valentino, at the head of a little cavalcade, trotted along the Bolognese road towards Imola, whose lights shone out ruddy through the gathering mist. A startling summons had recalled him from Milan, and he had been further hastened by a second despatch received midway. Arriving at the palace, he threw himself from his horse, and returned the brief greeting of Michelotto and Candale, who impatiently awaited his coming; his face was paler than usual, and beneath his eyes was the tint of blue that betrays nervous fatigue. He ascended the stair, motioning the others to follow; they entered an apartment, the attendants withdrew, and Candale, noticing that his master

cast distrait looks about, as though wondering at the absence of some one, murmured:

"She left when the news came, and went to Urbino."

"Urbino was no place of safety. Whose choice was that?"

"Donna Elvira's own. She declared you would arrive in time to save the castle, and vowed her life to prolong its defence—so says the abbess of the convent yonder."

"It is a useless danger; you did wrong to let her go."

"Nothing short of fetters would have kept her, and as to useless danger, the garrison is filled with ardor at her presence; and whereas three days since the walls would have been abandoned at sight of the enemy, they will be held now till you come."

The pages returned bearing a tray on which was a fiaschetto of red wine and some toasted bread and salt fish. Cesare unbuckled his sword, threw aside his cape, drew off a pair of riding-boots and substituted velvet slippers. He drank one glass of wine, swallowed a morsel of bread, and addressing Don Michele, said:

"Let us speak—and briefly: who is now in command at Urbino?"

"Pedro de Castro for this day and night."

"You return, then, immediately?"

"Yes. I came here to see you for an hour."

"You sent a despatch to Milan saying that Vitellozzo, Oliverotto and the Orsini are in arms against me."

"I heard their deliberation with my own ears."

"Ah!" cried Valentino, with long-drawn surprise.

"Yes," pursued Michelotto, "ever since the affair of Arezzo, you have had Vitellozzo and the Orsini watched; your spies were of small avail for such delicate work as finding how far the agreement of half a dozen men had proceeded; they discovered, however, that towards the last of September the Orsini betook themselves to a remote castle beside Thrasimene. I hastened thither from Urbino, assumed the dress of a mendicant friar, went through the farce of being thrown from a mule, begged leave to rest and recover, and was admitted.

"The Orsini looked in upon me in my darkened chamber, but my cowl and a long gray beard worn for the occasion would have disguised me against a far more searching scrutiny. So lay I two days, not daring to stir, scarce venturing so much as to answer the questions of an old menial who brought me pottage with bread and wine. On the second night there was unusual stir—the movement of horses in the court-yard, the tread of soldiers. The only opening in my room besides the door was a slip of a window so high that one could get sight of noth-

ing except a bit of sky and, by straining much, a line of mullions."

"To thy conclusion," broke in Valentino; "what matter sky and mullions?"

"At midnight I heard the voices of Vitellozzo and Oliverotto. In the morning, when the old man came, 'I scarce slept for the noise,' said I; 'has some mishap befallen?' 'No,' he answered, 'only a couple of knights stopped for shelter from this storm.' All the morning I waited and listened; the old man took each a tray of food to his room, and by this means I learned their number. One by one, towards noon, they went downstairs, and some one bolted my door on the outside. When all was still I cut a little hole in the woodwork, pried back the bolt, and followed after them. I heard all that was needful—my despatch gave you the substance of their discourse.

"I was returning to my cell, intending to bolt myself in, conceal the aperture I had made, and leave the castle on the following day, when—I came full upon the old servant; before he could stir or raise an alarm, I stabbed him to the heart.

"I had heard of the subterranean passage of Magione, and, guarded as the castle was, I could leave by no other way. The old man had a bunch of keys at his girdle; I took them and fled.

"I made my way noiselessly to the cellars and passages beneath the castle. I scarce know how in

the darkness I found the entrance. I hastened along the passage—at length I was out, locked the gate behind me, tossed away the keys and my friar's disguise. The rain and mist were so dense I could scarce discern the walls of Magione behind, or the surface of Thrasimene before. A fishing-boat lay on the beach, and some men loitered near by; for a ducat apiece they rowed me across to Castiglione. Not long after we lost the sight of land came the baying of dogs and the clamor of men from Magione; I shuddered at the sound, then laughed—laughed till the boatmen eyed me amazed, my nerves recovered from their tension, the danger that had been so imminent was over."

Valentino remained a moment lost in reverie; then looking up, he said:

"Urbino may be taken while we talk; haste you back, and commence to-morrow the inevitable retreat; instead of fighting there, we will gather here three days nearer to the French."

"And lose Urbino!" ejaculated his lieutenants, with one voice.

"Maledetto! we will retake it when these wolves are scattered. How strong is the garrison?"

"Less than a thousand."

"At best one to five. At dawn to-morrow send hither the Lady of Este with an escort; at sunrise start the cannon, and towards noon march with the garrison."

"But you will be with us?"

"Three dangers threaten. The least of them is at Urbino, and that I bid you withdraw from. The others are, that the French may delay, and that Florence may turn upon us now that we are at such disadvantage. These I remain here to meet."

"It is for the first time," answered Michelotto, "that you command me to retire from an enemy; nevertheless, I obey."

In the gray of the following morning he reached Urbino, and found all unchanged and the foe not yet in view. Elvira was informed of the resolve to abandon the town. Two hours later the cannon drawn from the ramparts set out by the road that she had already taken. Not long after appeared a vedette announcing the approach of the enemy.

To supplement their deficiency in cavalry, the confederates had placed a cross-bowman at the side of each horseman, holding by the stirrup leather. This vanguard, followed by Vitellozzo's corps, commenced a flanking circuit around the city, while the Orsini approached in front with artillery. Michelotto smiled as his practiced eye discovered only the regiments of his former companions—Petrucci and Baglioni had evidently deemed absence to be discretion. He turned to a knot of officers, and pointing to the horsemen, said:

"They must not reach our rear; we have seven

hundred men, half of them mounted; we will sally forth together as their flank is towards us, scatter them, and gain the shelter of Macerate forest."

He and his lieutenants were in full view of the approaching army—a group of mailed knights outlined on the rampart against the sky.

"Yonder is Michelotto," said Gravina to his brother, as they advanced beside the vanguard; "I should know those old yellow plumes the world over."

"He turns to go," ejaculated Pagolo, "and the others follow; it is either flight, or a venture in the open."

Michelotto's troops formed out of view, and at the word the horsemen emerged with order and rapidity from their concealment and trotted across the plain, the three hundred pikemen following. At this sight a bugle sounded from the confederate lines, then another, their cavalry wheeled to meet the onset, and Pagolo Orisini took place beside Vitellozzo.

The troopers of Borgia spurred their horses to a gallop; the cross-bowmen discharged their heavy bolts, many of which glanced from the armor they struck, though several men fell from their saddles and a score of horses faltered and sank to the earth. The horsemen of Vitellozzo now dashed forward to the encounter, and the opposing squadrons met with a resounding clash of metal. In the

mêlée that followed the cross-bowmen again discharged their missiles, this time at short distance and with deadly effect. At the same moment, a large column of Orsini's infantry that came running from the centre of the field engaged the pikemen whom Don Michele led, and broke their ranks by weight of numbers. Their leader was borne backward, and, seeing his manœuvre to check the enemy's pursuit a failure, and his troops in hopeless disarray, he wheeled his horse, and hastened from the field. One glance only he cast upon Urbino, and beheld its parapets already swarming with the advance of Oliverotto's division.

On the day of this conflict, some hours later in the afternoon, a page brought to Cesare at Imola a summons which called him abruptly from Elvira. It was the announcement of the long-expected envoy from Florence, and Cesare started at the word, impressed with the gravity of the conference about to be held with so astute a personage as Niccolo Machiavelli.

The new-comer was ushered at once into a hall occasionally used for banqueting, and fitted with more than usual richness. On the raftered ceiling were inlaid painted porcelain tiles, the latest luxury of the time; the windows were of illuminated glass; on the sideboards were ranged green and

ruby flagons, and silver beakers; upon the walls were fixed sconces with candles; while here and there between the wainscoting were frescos of dames and gallants strolling by the waterside, or seated pensive with mandolin and lute beneath garden porticoes, or dancing in slow and graceful measure on the green sward, against the clear transparent sky of an Italian evening.

They entered this room simultaneously—the two most subtle men the genius of their country produced in their day—the most renowned and the least familiarly known of any historical characters of the sixteenth century.

It was their first meeting, and they greeted one another with the warmth of a mutual interest.

Cesare took in at a glance the spare, well-knit figure of his still youthful visitor, clad in the travelling costume in which he had just come by post; then his gaze rested upon the watchful, brilliant eyes, the untroubled brow, the calm, thoughtful face, stamped with mental application.

Both in ripeness of intellectual powers and in maturity of political experience Machiavelli had attained the acme of his life. Skilled by his apprenticeship in the methods of the dark and complicated statecraft which accented the decline of Italian mediæval greatness, he had come to regard the life of a ruler as a magnificent game—power, the prize of the successful; exile, impris-

onment, death, the penalty of the vanquished. In his scale of ethics the highest virtue was patriotic love of home that took the place of country—a love so generous, that when the native city demanded a crime the voice of conscience was silent. In his conception, the education of a Prince should denude the heart of sympathy, the brain of prejudice, the daily life of friendship. All men should be friends or foes according to the occasion; all things should be good or bad according to necessity. In the place of the softer traits, it should develop the range of mental and historic vision. It should produce nerves which could endure long fatigue, be vigilant through the watches of the night, ever ready to confront danger, and able to suffer reverses, loss, physical pain, with self-command. So far as his station in life permitted, Machiavelli had reached the attainment of his ideal; in the promise of the young Duke of Romagna he foresaw its complete fulfilment.

Cesare took his guest by the hand, and motioned him to seats within an alcove, through whose windows the last rays of the sun were streaming.

"You have kept me waiting," he began, smiling, and with half-reproachful tone; "now, at the eleventh hour, you come to judge how it fares with me in this storm."

"I tarried because those who sent me were yet

in consultation," answered the Florentine, in a subdued, sweet voice. "Reputation and the opportunity, says the sage, should not be lost, and the fortune of many being at stake, we armed ourselves against the fool's fervor."

"Your Signoria has been put to trouble because of me."

"We were contriving means to win such a friend."

"Whoso scans me so closely must discover faults. But tell me, la bella Firenze deliberates."

"We have sought to inform ourselves," replied the envoy evasively.

Borgia eyed the speaker with attention.

"Let us come nearer the subject uppermost in the mind of both," he said. "If not friends, we would be good neighbors—am I not right? There have been misunderstandings, and some of your eminent men are estranged; but in these perilous days necessity is upon us both; cannot our griefs be healed—cannot Arezzo, whosoever's fault it was, be forgotten?"

"Forgiven it might be; forgotten—no."

"You dwell upon an idle distinction."

"This is not an idle distinction; love and hate forget, but wounded vanity never."

"Vanity is too frivolous even for——"

"Even for Florentines?" suggested Machiavelli;

"but you forget that pride belongs to the strong, and that it is with bubbles that old men and old states beguile themselves."

"Call it forgiven, then, so we dismiss the thought and apply ourselves to better purposes."

"In our Tuscan hills the peasants have a saying —*Strength lays its roots at home.*"

"An excellent device for those who never stir abroad. And by that you mean——"

"That while all your officers and nine-tenths of your men are in revolt, your alliance cannot be valuable; nor your possession of Romagna as secure as ours of Arezzo."

"You have not then heard the news?"

"No," answered the other dryly; "it must be good news since you alone possess it."

"Ay, that it is; nothing less than that the Orsini are about to resume their service with me."

"Then rid you of such faithless knights," answered Machiavelli, "for behold this letter; I got it on my way to your presence."

And so saying he drew from his breast a parchment which Valentino unfolded and read half aloud.

We assault Urbino to-morrow; the populace will rise at our signal; we are six thousand strong; answer our offer; together we overthrow Borgia and defy the French.

URSINUS.

"From a captain about to return to your service," added the Florentine.

Valentino slowly raised his face and answered, "these Barons seek to make the best terms for themselves, but they must make terms with me; I am in treaty with them—the details will arrange themselves."

"Then you no longer need the French?" asked Machiavelli, with a searching gaze.

"You think one cannot visit King Louis without buying his army. It was to persuade him to remain at Milan, to spare Central Italy his passage, which would be the signal for an advance of the Spaniards upon Rome, that I sought him."

"If that were indeed your motive," said the Florentine, incredulously, "so noble an aim should be prospered."

"You think ill of the French."

"I think ill of any stranger who comes with arms in his hands."

"And I too detest the invaders, be they of the Seine, the Tagus, or the Danube. May we not aspire to rest upon this mutual enmity, an alliance which danger, if naught else, should render possible? There are emergencies when defeat is not to be compensated by a dozen subsequent victories—when success outweighs a score of reverses on less decisive fields Such a crisis confronts me now. Think you to treat better with Vitellozzo and the

Orsini than with me?—or left alone and defenceless how will you confront them, or how divert the ravenous army of Louis from projects each of which involves you?"

"Your army without you is less to be depended on than you without your army?"

"In treating with me, you have the warrant and pledge of the Church."

"It was the Church which called even the Turk into Italy. But enough. For the reason that on you rests the last hope of averting several calamities, I do not wish you the ill you think. My recommendations depend upon your answers. I can influence the Signoria; they need emphatic words to harmonize their councils. First, am I right in understanding that the armed support of you by the French is a myth?"

"A myth which two years ago did me infinite mischief, and which now, were it proffered, I dare not accept," answered Borgia, resorting to the only means of cajoling his mistrustful guest.

"Of this you shall give me a guarantee more substantial than the pledge of the Vatican."

"You shall have hostages, and in proportion as you relieve my peril, will I serve you hereafter."

"I cannot relieve your peril further than to restrain the arms of Florence from joining with those of your enemies."

"Grant me thus much and your love—I ask nothing more."

"On my side," continued Machiavelli, "I give my promise, which has never failed. Our agreement is a secret personal to ourselves. Upon your assurance that the French shall not enter Romagna, and that there shall be no alliance betwixt you and them, I engage that not a ducat or a man at arms shall go from Florence to the Orsini."

These were conditions impossible for Cesare to execute; it was now, however, only a question of concurring for the sake of gaining time. So it was with an accent of spontaneous sincerity that he answered—

"It is agreed."

"And now," pursued Machiavelli, "the hostage."

"Oh," answered Valentino, carelessly, "you shall have any officers not absolutely needed."

"I would not deprive you of a single sword. There is but one hostage I know of within easy reach, whose danger will bind you: where the treasure is, there will the heart be also."

"Treasure! gold!" exclaimed Cesare, surprised at such venality. "It is yours."

"Gold!" answered Machiavelli, with disdain, "offer gold to your Roman nobles and prelates, or to the starving mongrels that swarm across the Alps. No; I have a fetter you shall not slip.

You ask my love; in return you shall pledge me yours. There is here one who, for your sake, has sacrificed much; for whose favor, this summer, your interests have been neglected. When so much that is precious is given, men must be right that it is love. Her you shall pledge as your surety."

Valentino saw the trap after it had closed. To refuse, even to demur, would expose his bad faith. He was conscious of having been outwitted. Deprived of the strong arm of France, his mistress' life was to rivet the bonds. To recede was to add the forces of Tuscany to the camp of the revolted Barons.

"She will not consent," he objected, after a moment's thought.

"That," replied Machiavelli, "depends upon you."

"You purpose to take her to Florence?"

"Not take her thither myself, for I remain here; but I shall immediately place her in the care of those who will answer for her safety."

"Then await my return, while I propose this strange demand."

Valentino left the room, and the Florentine seated himself and waited. He was never impatient, least of all when circumstances had turned to his advantage. That Elvira would consent, he

never doubted; he knew that women love a man in proportion to his exactions; her sacrifice, by the violation of their agreement, did not accord with his knowledge of Cesare's infatuation. As the instants passed, he imagined what was being said —the tearful hesitation, the soft entreaty, the pledge of prompt release, the vows of unwavering fidelity——

The door opened, and Cesare reappeared leading Elvira by the hand. Machiavelli advanced to greet the Estense, his eyes fixed in admiration of her loveliness, ere, yielding to embarrassment, she dropped her veil without speaking. He extended his hand to her, while Cesare, following to the stair, gazed earnestly after them, till they passed the doorway and were gone. Then he turned and crossed the deserted chamber whence Elvira had issued. He seated himself absently in reverie—a reverie abruptly ended as a messenger entered bearing a dispatch from Don Michele. It contained but five words, and Borgia read them in silence that betrayed not the stroke he suffered:

Urbino capta est. Exercitu confoditur.

CHAPTER XIII.

BY THE TIBER.

On the morning of the nineteenth day of December, 1502, his Holiness Pope Alexander Sixth was the busiest man in Rome. His habits of unflagging industry had grown to a thirst for occupation: no point of the horizon that shaped itself about his family was beyond his scrutiny; no thread in the ever weaving and ravelling woof of Italian diplomacy escaped his attention.

The papers which usually covered his writing-table had, for the moment, been pushed together to make room for a sack of German gold—two thousand and odd pieces, the equivalent of many years' indulgence for miscellaneous sins past or to come, an absolution or a license, as the purchaser preferred.

"How fruitful a spiritual soil is this of Germany," chuckled the good-natured Pontiff; "magnificent missals and silver chalices, flaxen-haired girls for our—nunneries, and gold in lieu of the unprofitable penances of former days." Then returning the coins by handfuls into their leather

pouch, he removed it, murmuring, "For Giulia when she comes," and resumed the perusal of a sequence of dispatches.

Giulia Farnèse at this moment stood at the summit of the lofty flight of steps by which the descent is made from Ara Cœli. She had come out from that venerable church filled with the devout impressions of the mass just recited; the chant still rang in her ears as she passed between the long line of uneven pillars that we see to-day, and across sculptured tombs set in the pavement, which the tread of millions has worn to smooth indistinctness. Now, the Roman sunshine flooded all about her with radiance, mellowing the verdure and foliage that lay over the buried Forum, and softening the outline of the Alban hills. Her fellow worshippers thronged from the church, while she paused to gaze around.

To the left lay the Arch of Titus, and behind it the Coliseum, in front stretched the verdant slopes of Palatinus, and to the right at her feet was a wooden cross, ornamented with the paraphernalia of the crucifixion, before which the contadini reverently paused. A short cut, of which the bearers of her litter availed themselves, took Giulia through one of the artisans' quarters—a hive of industry in times of quiet—a centre of turbulence in riotous days. Between the fluttering curtains she could see the armorer hammering at his blades; the

potter turning a half-finished earthen vessel on his lathe, while with deft fingers he gave it form; the girl seated at the loom, and casting the shuttle from hand to hand; the women at the upper windows chatting across the narrow street.

As the litter was halted in the court-yard of the Vatican, she roused herself from a deep preoccupation; some of the officers of her household hastened obsequiously forward, the most demonstrative of whom was the jester Pulcio: but Giulia was in no bantering mood, so bidding the hunchback be in waiting presently at her breakfast table, whither he frequently brought such morsels of gossip and scandal as the breeze blew in his way, she hastened to the private apartment of Alexander.

His Holiness rose from his employment as she entered, took both her hands and kissed them.

"Before you recount the success of your mission," he began, "here is a *buona mano;* the laborer is worthy of his hire, and whoever brings fish to land with such dainty casts, should be laden with gold."

"Overladen!" answered Giulia laughing, and letting the weighty bag drop back upon the table. "Is it with such grievous burdens you afflict the bearer of good news?"

"You, Giulia," replied the Pontiff, "are one of the few that can always say—I have succeeded. And now sit you before me: your letter of last

evening gave me the result; tell me now the outline; the details can wait."

"Ginevra and I brought our long parley to an end last night," began the Farnèse. "Savelli, after this week's hesitation, consents to the conference fixed for to-day. As you anticipated, he required a hostage, and our cousin the cardinal is at this hour in the hands of the Colonna; the count arrived last evening; I talked with him, but met only reticences, and as it grew late and Ginevra begged me, I rested with her the night, and delayed but an instant at Ara Cœli this morning. Ginevra dreaded a night alone with her hot-headed lord," added Giulia maliciously.

"All this your letter told me," answered the Pope with an expression of disappointment; "but were the reticences you speak of so inflexible that not one of the temptations, not one of the stings I suggested could move him?"

"As well sting a bale of hay, or tempt an ox with a penny. He was courteous, listened attentively, and replied nothing. Further than the generalities you indicated I dared not venture; only at supper I raised my goblet and whispered, *Health to the new governor of Rome*, and what think you he answered —that the governors of Rome were usually too short lived to make health an object!"

"That was neither reticent nor courteous," exclaimed the Pope; "you said he was both."

"That repartee is the sole fruit of all your stings and temptations."

"Seemed he robust and well?"

"Sturdy as an oak."

"Good. No man of vigorous life disdains wealth and power. You have done excellent service in showing where and how he must be met—and trust me I have a bait shall take him;" and Alexander rubbed his hands.

"This will be pleasant for Cardinal Borgia," replied Giulia; "he stipulated for one week's confinement at most, and should your aim be reached, he must spend his remaining days in a fortress."

"What, a hostage for my own governor-general!"

"The words are Ginevra's; she said, 'My husband will neither visit Rome nor live in it without better guaranty than any safe-conduct. The removal of the Orsini must needs be sanguinary, and will not encourage him to become their successor.'"

"And why," inquired the Pontiff, passing to another thought, "why has not Ginevra been with her husband in his exile?"

"They have not fared well together these last years; besides, she thought herself in greater safety here."

"If there is nothing more between them than a pettish jealousy, we must begin by reconciling Savelli with his wife."

"The laws of human nature do not apply to madmen; on the subject of his wife the count is insane."

"And Ginevra? It is months since I saw her."

"Not quite so blithe of spirit; her nature, she says, rather than circumstances, conspires against her."

Giulia rose, took up her bundle of Peter's golden pence, and said, "I must bestow your gift in safety; moreover, I still fast. Summon me if my persuasions are needed with that difficult man."

The Pope did not long remain plunged in the meditations in which his fair visitor had left him. A clerical functionary presently announced Cardinal Corneto in waiting for the audience to which he had been summoned, and a moment later his Eminence was ushered in. He had nowise changed within the year since we met him at the Belvedere Villa; he retained in age that vigor which comes from abstemious habits, and his most marked characteristics—love of wealth and fear of danger—survived in undiminished force. His restless eye wandered incessantly as if searching for some indication of lurking peril. The loss of the perquisites of his former office of secretary was made up for by extortions wherever a thousand crowns could be wrung from timid avarice, or cajoled from aspiring intrigue. He entered, dignified yet subservient, with the bland urbanity of the Italian priest, and

having with flattering speech kissed the hand of his Holiness, seated himself as bidden.

"Ever since the loss of your services," began Alexander in the contemplative tone of one who looks along a vista of years, "my affairs have suffered. And not merely mine, but the fortunes of Valentino want the prospered impetus or moderation of those far-sighted communings. But though the needs of your private concerns and the care of benevolent works deprive me of your daily presence, you have continued to favor me with a keen judgment where the range of my own vision failed. It is for such a service I have summoned you; it is such a forecast that I need. May I depend upon you?"

"Implicitly," promised the cardinal in a tone of relief.

"It is no light matter."

"Your Holiness began by saying that I have never been wanting."

"No; but here secrecy is no less than wisdom. I am about to place my own and Cesare's fortunes in your hands."

So saying, Alexander rose from his chair and paced up and down the room. Presently he stopped midway, and, pointing to one of the walls, said:

"You know that yonder is a sliding panel and an iron box?"

Corneto remembered both well. He was not likely to forget certain surreptitious visits to the state papers, nor that his inspections had been interrupted by the discovery a year before, that in the Pope's absence a brace of condottieri were stationed hard by. A tiny peep-hole in the outer wainscoting had saved his life by this timely observation, and since then, with the exception of the theft of the supposititious report of Cesare to his father, which, as we know, he had sold to Cardinal Orsini, he had abhorred the secret panel, and shunned the Pope's study, save when bidden to it, albeit he knew that the watchers had long since been withdrawn. If his alarm had been awakened by the summons to a strangely early conference, his misgivings redoubled at this query as he replied,

"Years ago your Holiness took papers from some secret locker thereabouts to show me."

"Even so. And now I have put there a packet of letters from Venice. Here is a *résumé* of extracts from some of them, without the names of the writers; they all relate to an alliance with St. Mark. Take this paper; ponder well the reasons put forward, and two days hence give me a sage counsel."

Alexander was accustomed to allow largely for the accidents that unhinge the best-conceived designs. Aware that his son was about to attempt a

stroke against the Orsini, he had resolved, in addition to the temptation of the imaginary letters, to give Corneto the opportunity to warn them, having ordered that every messenger leaving for Romagna that day or the next should be intercepted, so that were the cardinal in sympathy with the barons he would betray himself.

To the Pontiff's exposition of his son's purposes, the cardinal listened with a composure that came of long familiarity with sudden emergencies, and also with the resolve, if time yet remained, to warn the brothers of their peril. Alexander vaguely mentioned the following week for the casting of the net—to save their lives would bring the reward of a coffer of ducats, and perhaps preferment when the Borgias should be gone and a new Pope reigned; for like most old men, the cardinal built loftily for the future. As to the advice Alexander sought, he confined himself to an approval of Cesare's intentions, curtly declaring that no truce could hold with traitors. The Pope observed a slightly absent manner, and an occasional brevity of speech. He drew his inference, and gave him *congé* without further delay.

Once beyond the sacred presence, Corneto hastened along the vast corridor, between groups of pages and domestics, with here and there a sentinel in casque and ruffled frill and gayly-colored doublet and hose, leaning upon his halberd.

Already as he passed, unheeding the salutes addressed him, he was busy with his plan of rescue. That young Trasteverino should ride the swift gray stallion, starting from the Appian Gate, making a wide circuit of the walls, crossing the Tiber miles above the city, and bearing to Pagolo the one word, *Beware!*

There must be no papers, and, if taken, the youth should assume the character of a fugitive from his master guilty of no worse than peculation.

Filled with these preoccupations, he was halfway down the great stair of the Vatican when a group beginning the ascent struck him with amaze and instantly dispelled his benevolent intentions.

Foremost—his safe-conduct in his hand—came Cardinal Orsini, uncle of Pagolo and Gravina, attended by the secretaries of his Holiness, and followed by a guard of honor.

It flashed upon Corneto that his colleague, while imagining himself advancing to an audience of the Pontiff, was already a prisoner—that Alexander had captured the one while his son was entrapping the others. The chance which had prolonged his own colloquy, and had brought the Orsini a trifle earlier than his appointed hour, had put them thus face to face. He understood that it must be already too late to frustrate Cesare's plans; he realized, too, that neither word nor gesture of warning could pass from him without detection by

the eager eyes of those who followed the doomed man.

He therefore resumed his way composedly; and with grave and courteous salutation the two cardinals exchanged greetings, the one passing out to the desolate space before the Vatican, which has become the architectural Piazza of St. Peter's, the other pursuing his way with the first qualms of misgiving at the armed retinue which, immediately upon his entrance, had closed behind him.

That there was abundant reason for his doubts, Orsini discovered a few steps further.

Instead of continuing in the direction of Alexander's apartments, he was suddenly confronted by Monsignor Roccamura, who, discarding all accustomed reverences, motioned him towards another corridor. The cardinal, stunned by that abrupt summons, and remembering Magione, trembled. His eyes fell upon the unfolded safe-conduct, then he glanced at the officers and soldiers—and knew his fate.

"As you hope for grace," he sobbed, "let me throw myself at the feet of his Holiness."

His only answer was an imperative gesture.

He looked despairingly around, and there, at the end of the hall, he perceived Giulia Farnèse.

He gave one loud cry—the entreaty of despair to the mercy of woman—then he was dragged by the

way his feet refused to bear him, through a succession of galleries, till his captors brought him to an iron door which opens upon the famous passage connecting the Vatican Palace with its citadel—the Castle of St. Angelo; and along that passage he was led, struggling, bewildered, terror-stricken, almost fainting, till presently he came to himself, alone in a prison cell of small dimensions, with no light save the glimmer of a narrow aperture beneath the ceiling, and devoid of other furniture than a wooden bench.

The guards on the terrace heard his cries all that afternoon and through the following day, but heeded not.

The sun rose and sank, and all was quiet; the weakness of starvation had silenced the prisoner. And when, two days later, he was laid in state in his own palace, those who came to gaze once more upon the familiar face, suddenly sunken in death, wondered at the calm serenity of the features, and murmured one to another—

"*He sleeps, but his soul is with God!*"

The early hours of the day we have described having been thus employed, the Pontiff betook himself to the gardens of the Vatican for refreshment in the crisp winter air. He was preceded by a couple of pages, and followed by a few ecclesiastics and lacqueys, this promenade being only

for recreation and without the restraints of ceremonial.

The pleasure grounds in rear of St. Peter's had not their present extent or magnificence. A painting of them of 1505 shows long, straight walks, an occasional arbor, a fountain, here and there a statue—all stiff and formal, according to the landscape gardening from which were derived the terraces and trim parterres of Blois and Fontainebellant. In front lay the vast substructures of St. Peter's; behind stretched the desolate Janiculum, and from an occasional eminence one looked over Trastevere and caught a glimpse of the yellow Tiber and the far Campania. Alexander walked briskly, now calling one of the priests to his side for some brief inquiry, now moving forward alone, pensive and abstracted, anon stopping at some favorite nook to listen to the persuasive music of a fountain, or to scan the flowerless beds, or to watch a lizard that darted timidly across the wall and lingered to observe him with wondering eye.

After an hour he returned to the Vatican and betook himself to a dining-room, where exactly at the hour of noon his simple repast of broth, beef, and red wine was served. Shortly after his return to the study where he had passed the morning, his secretary announced the attendance of Count Savelli.

It had been a year of strife and vicissitude for the Colonna, driven from Rome by their powerful rivals the Orsini, and reduced to distant strongholds, where resistance might be indefinitely protracted, and whence they could return for occasional rencounters in the field. The count had found a healthful distraction in the command of a section of the Colonna army.

He had not met Ginevra until Giulia brought them together as an incident of Alexander's change of alliance from one family to the other.

Count Savelli was ushered into the papal presence with salute of honor, and with every dignity. In the antechamber he was desired to leave his rapier and stiletto, as was the etiquette for all not in the militant service of the Holy See.

Alexander received him without rising, and extended his hand, which the count raised to his lips as he bent on one knee.

"It is to those we love and from whom we have been longest parted that the warmest welcome is offered," said the Pontiff, with gentle benignity, and motioning his visitor to a seat; "even an old man's heart warms at the story of your exploits in the Abruzzi; so valiant a son of the Church is perhaps the dearer for the very reason of absence."

"The absence is not altogether my fault," observed Savelli.

"Nor mine," quietly rejoined the Pope. "It is

attributable to one who regrets it. The amends I seek to make should satisfy. Justice is rarely swift of foot."

"It rarely comes at all," assented the count.

"My offers have been communicated to you," pursued Alexander, seeking to lead his visitor to less sombre thoughts than those his memories evoked.

"Holy Father, you bid us to a service to which the Orsini were similarly called. They are now to be disgraced. Will their reward be ours?"

"The faithless get the wages they earn," answered the Pope, stung by the question. "Your recompense shall be that which is withheld from those who turn against us the swords we buy!"

"Your Holiness is at variance with the Orsini—the chosen guardians of the Church?"

"They have outraged every duty."

"And the Colonna are to hold them fast while the Duke Valentino strips off their goods, their castles, their all."

"They have proved unworthy of the office that shall be yours."

The count paused in silent meditation. In all the farce, as he conceived it, of a pretended rupture between the Church and the Orsini, and in this proposal of alliance with his masters, on whose behalf he had been sent to this interview, Savelli saw but a snare of stupendous malignity, wherein

the Colonna, their soldiers and riches, were to be taken at a single cast of the net.

"Know you not," cried the Pope, "that they have conspired with the enemies of the Duke of Romagna, and are in open revolt?"

"I do not," replied the count, in these blunt words expressing all his mistrust.

Alexander was silenced by the magnitude of the suspicion disclosed; an expression of malice and cunning gathered upon his face; he leaned forward and whispered:

"You doubt my quarrel with the Orsini! I will convince you. Within five days you shall see the dead face of Cardinal Orsini; in twelve days more you shall know the fate of his nephews."

Savelli received this ominous confidence without emotion, and apparently without a diminution of doubt.

"If the campaign in Romagna is earnest," he answered, "we shall see the duke driven from his possessions before Christmas greens are gathered."

"A little time will show," replied the Pontiff; "but," he pursued, "if my words prove prophetic, a great factor will drop from the statecraft of Rome, and in presence of new elements, whose power none can foresee, the Church will need your support."

"It is the Church that stripped the Colonna of all their possessions and drove them outcast to the mountains."

"All shall be twice repaid, and in power, I will place the Colonna among the stars."

"Many have been placed among the stars who would fain have remained upon earth."

"The chief who dares not seize his fortune should ungird his useless sword," retorted the Pope.

"The swords are strong, and the hearts are bold; but after years of persecution we hesitate to engage either."

"Fear not. But when you behold the deeds presently to be done, know that we have need of you, and hasten to us. Tell the Colonna that were we reconciled and the Orsini scourged for their crimes, none would remain to disturb us. The present should be carved in golden portions, and the future be stormless—go, tell them that."

The Venetian envoy Zorzi, passing through Trastevere, looked with wonder as Colonna's henchman issued from the Vatican. He returned the count's salutation, then hastening through the lanes which spread a labyrinth along the edge of the river, he murmured to himself—

"Corneto must be informed of this."

But even as he bent his steps towards the cardinal's palace near by, he changed his mind; better, he thought, to alarm the heads of the Orsini faction of the danger which menaced, than

to lose an hour with Corneto. He altered his course, and presently approached the fortified palace of that family. But the accustomed livery was not at the gate; the soldiers of the Church were already in occupation, and in answer to his attendant's inquiry, the ambassador was courteously informed that Cardinal Orsini was from home.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MASTERPIECE.

For Cesare Borgia, who valued life in proportion to its intensity, the month of December, 1502, held the most stirring hours of his career.

The necessity (heretofore incomprehensible to the historians of his time) in which he so suddenly and strangely found himself, of countermanding the approach of Langres' corps for the sake of the hostage held by the Florentine envoy, placed him in an extreme predicament; but he discovered an expedient even in the meshes which gathered about his helplessness.

His assurance to Machiavelli that negotiations with the barons had been commenced was true, although his own hope of a satisfactory outcome was not in agreement with the conclusion he predicted. The result of his advances was a complete surprise; shortly after the capture of Urbino, the Orsini assented to a truce, and Pagolo showed himself disposed to reconciliation.

The situation of the confederates was, to say the least, equivocal. The timid Baglioni and Petrucci

had turned a deaf ear to the most importunate summons. The force in the field was but half the number counted on; the Florentine Republic spurned with disdain the proffered alliance of a band of revolted condottieri.

King Louis threatened them as he threatened all. That for two weeks Valentino stood upon the brink of ruin, and that on any day during that interval the Orsini could have marched to Imola, and with a single onset have scattered the motley companies there assembled, is no less certain than that they were deterred from doing so by that dread of some indefinite consequence, whose shadow so often stays the strong arm and gives breathing-time to those at bay.

So the opportunity slipped between their hesitations, while to their enemy's camp swarmed men at arms of every description—free lances in quest of booty, roving troops of German horsemen, squads of pikemen attracted by the promise of unusual pay—until the numerical disproportion between the camps of Imola and Urbino ceased.

Under these altered conditions the barons signified their willingness to parley. Cesare's first meeting was with Pagolo Orsini, for whose safety Cardinal Borgia was given in pledge; the condottiere returned two days later with gifts and fervent assurances.

"It is I who am most to blame," Cesare had said.

"I have fallen into grievous error. Without you I am stripped of armor. Yet I meant no greater ill than that I dared not follow in all your reckless adventures; but I should have spoken frankly and not nursed anger. Your inexpert manœuvres caused such complications—such startling rumors were on every tongue, that I stood on my guard where you had left me, while you with your bands melted away in the mists of the Apennines.

"We have been mistaken in our judgments of each other. If you have grudged me my successes, I never have withheld a golden share in them; if in these last months I have harbored ungenerous thoughts, forgive me, and let our arms be used once more for mutual advantage. That which is accomplished to your gain shall remain. Oliverotto shall keep Fermo; Vitellozzo shall have Pesaro in lieu of Arezzo, and Urbino itself is yours if only all griefs between us be forgotten."

Emboldened by this hearing, Oliverotto next sought Valentino, and the shade of embarrassment which lay upon the condottiere was dispelled by the welcome which greeted him.

Not since the first taking of Urbino had they met. The identity of the dead Fieschi had led to investigation, and Elvira's eyes having fallen upon a letter of Oliverotto, she had instantly declared it the hand of her Ferrarese suitor, Vallon d'Avrées.

This discovery fastened a chapter of offences upon

Vitellozzo's pupil. The tell-tale cipher despatch, "*Fermo à vous, fidèle à nous;*" the shaft of the Vatican garden; the rescue of Isidore Savelli; the attack at the falcon hunt; the mutinous seizure of Fermo; complicity in the revolt of Magione—all these had Oliverotto to answer for, but all these seemed extinguished in the amiable mood of Borgia, who talked only of reconciliation, and of rich successes to come.

Oliverotto's heart was relieved as well as gladdened, and in the contentment of no longer being at odds with so formidable an adversary, he would fain have bestirred himself forthwith upon some errand of arms. It was with a smile at his own grim humor that he thought to turn the tables upon his faithless colleagues of Siena and Perugia, in suggesting them as wealthy, defenceless, and within easy reach.

Without dampening his lieutenant's zeal, the duke musingly objected that it were prudence to prepare with greater deliberation before striking at such important neighbors.

Then, urged Oliverotto, might not they aim at smaller quarry—Sinigallia, for instance—if but to seal the restored friendship? To this no drawback offered, and the elated condottiere returned to Urbino with greetings to Gravina and Vitellozzo, appointing Sinigallia the trysting-place for all.

Of the four chiefs, Vitellozzo openly doubted

the faith of Borgia, and was only persuaded to a course he mistrusted by the arguments and assurances of Pagolo, for whose wisdom he had a regard akin to veneration. Gravina yielded to the judgment of his brother, though with half a heart.

And so, at mid-December, the barons gathered their veteran soldiery and marched upon the helpless town, whose princeling put to sea in an open boat at their approach, and whose crumbling walls could not have delayed their entrance for an hour.

Contrary to expectation, Cesare was not present at the entry of their regiments, which, however, occasioned small comment, for they had daily news from him, and he was known to have started from Imola with thirty-five hundred men. But immediately after the occupation, Pagolo received from Cesare a despatch explaining that to disband his remnant of French mercenaries had seemed a means of allaying possible suspicions, and that he devoted two days to its execution. All doubts, save Vitellozzo's, subsided at this evidence of loyalty.

It was the dawn of a winter's morning by the Adriatic. The troops lay in their quarters in the town; the sentries gazed listlessly upon a distance which harbored no enemy; here and there an officer drowsed in some shelter or watched the silvering orient; the cocks crew, a dog barked in

the distance and another answered; the birds chirped fitfully, waiting for the inspiration of the sun.

And Vitellozzo, undisturbed by these faint tokens of a re-awakening world, slumbered and dreamt.

He beheld the familiar scenes of Città di Castello, the hill sides, the broad fields, the castle gate of his home, and the faces of his wife and of Anselmo and Francesca, sweet and tender as always, yet strangely sad as his eyes encountered theirs.

The scene changed, and he beheld a banquet, deserted by all but himself and a single lingering guest who sat beside him at the table, indistinct of face, till as the dreamer gazed intently the features became clear and he beheld his murdered brother, Paolo Vitelli. He saw again, as though restored to life, the stalwart frame and handsome countenance, the bronzed complexion, the high, thoughtful brow, the speaking eye, the long dark hair. His heart throbbed, but a resistless power held him motionless.

Then the spectre smiled, and rising, beckoned him to follow. Vitellozzo struggled vainly. He sought to seize the hand that motioned, but the figure moved away, and passing beneath a curtain waved a salutation of final summons—and with a gasp the sleeper awoke.

When the sun stood in the sky, and the breath of scanty flowers and the odor of dead leaves touched the winter air with perfumes faint as the remembered pathos of the autumn, Pagolo and Gravina and Vitellozzo rode together on white mules caparisoned with bells and crimson trappings, along a winding wood-path, with here and there a glimpse through the olive branches upon the far-off glistening sea.

They rode in silence. Behind followed their escort of mounted troopers. No breeze stirred the branches whose December foliage was raised above them in metallic tints. No sound was upon the air save the thud of hoof-beats upon the turf, and once from a monastery the sound of many droning voices.

"On such a winter's morning as this," said Vitellozzo, at length interrupting their long silence, "went I two years ago by Cesare's command along this Adriatic shore, with guard of half a dozen men, to see an unknown prisoner die."

"And your prisoner's offending was unknown?" asked Pagolo, absently.

"Yes; we were bidden to lead him to the water-side at a given place, and there be the witnesses of his death while he despatched himself."

"I never yet heard of an execution without a headsman," remarked the matter-of-fact Gravina.

"The manner of his end was conceded to him:

at the edge of the water we unbound his hands and feet; he threw his cloak aside, and took something into his mouth and gazed about while you might count a hundred, upon the sparkling waves before, and the blue sky above, and then he turned and looked back at the uplands as though his fancy were with the sunlit brooks amid the hills, and then he dashed into the water and swam away, till suddenly he raised himself—then sank, and we saw him no more."

"'Tis odd," remarked Pagolo, wearying of Vitellozzo's sombre thoughts, "that so cheerless a memory comes to you at this hour when we are on our way to meet the triumphs and fortunes that shall be ours ere another harvest."

"I think of him to-day," pursued Vitellozzo, heedless of the words, "for I remember his face and the look that was on it, and I know now his thought and the meaning that lay in his eyes—that it is sad to look one's last on Earth!"

"Still the tremors of yesterday!" ejaculated Pagolo, impatiently. "Nay, turn back—rejoin Oliverotto at his regiment, or seek your own and wait beneath the shelter of a thousand pikes till to-night we bring you a wine-cup brimming from the feast." Then more gently, and as though seeking by his sympathy to lighten the gloom which had settled upon his companion, he added:

"I, too, have my sombre hours; often have I lain

on the greensward of a secluded glade with some solemn mountain face in view, and the voice of nature speaking in the fall of a cascade—and above, the rustling tree-tops, and beyond them the white clouds sailing across the blue—and I have thought how, when the sod covers me, the sunshine will be bright and warm as ever, and the tidings of the breeze as gladsome, and the birds continue to fill the summer air with song."

"Ay, so shall it be!" interrupted Vitellozzo, discovering in his companion's words a reflex of his own dream. "And when that which is to happen is upon us, remember that my last words were spoken in our old love."

"What is it that is upon us and that is about to happen!" cried Pagolo, crossing himself and eyeing his comrade uneasily.

Before Vitellozzo could answer, a shout came from Gravina, who had cantered ahead, as though in reply to his brother.

"It is he, Valentino," he cried, "just before us."

The elder Orsini's attention was instantly diverted.

"Yes, it is Valentino!" he exclaimed, with a brightening face, as the young duke and his retinue came in view; "and at his side is Michelotto, grave as ever—and to think I could have unsheathed my sword against a comrade."

Behind Cesare rode Ramiro d'Orco and Candale

with a troop of cuirassed horsemen. Further away and out of view were long files of infantry advancing through the woods.

Never had Valentino seemed so joyous of mood as when on this sunshiny morning he exchanged greetings with his reinstated lieutenants. His words were cordial; he grasped the hand of each with good-will; his expression was smiling and benignant.

"Shall we ride together?" he asked, suavely addressing Pagolo; and as they turned towards the town, he beckoned Vitellozzo to ride beside him at his left.

"For," said he pleasantly, "'tis many a day since we held converse together." None but Don Michele, to whom it was directed, observed the quick, stealthy glance which meant—*Oliverotto.*

The Spaniard presently trotted on to speak a courteous word to the officer commanding the Orsini escort, and then cantered leisurely ahead. Valentino rode between Pagolo and Vitellozzo, and Gravina followed, accompanied by Ramiro and Candale. They chatted lightly together, and more than once Pagolo glanced towards the still dejected lord of Città di Castello, as though to deride his apprehensions.

Don Michele pursued his way to the gate of the town, where, despite his preoccupations, he gave a soldier's scrutinizing look at the rampart, the

draw-bridge, the balcony screened with planks whence scalding pitch could be poured upon the assailants: entering upon a piazza, he beheld the gayly colored frescoes, the poles stretched at the second and third stories of each house, whereon the housewife dried her linen, the windows projected over the narrow streets, the space growing narrower till at the last windows the occupants could have touched hands across the street.

In a square farther on Oliverotto was found busy with his soldiers, assigning the guards for the quarters of the town, and preparing for a salute of honor—a bugle flourish and a roll of the high scarlet drums when the duke's approach should be signalled.

The exchange of salutations was brief. Oliverotto's constraint took the form of a careless bluntness which contrasted with the courteous bearing of the Spaniard.

"Cesare has sent for you," said Don Michele; "he marvels that you alone come not to welcome him. Leave here your troops for an hour—or, better still, dismiss them to their quarters; we have near upon four thousand men to house somewhere in this town, and if trouble arises betwixt your soldiery and ours as to whose lodging is this or that, it will make a graceless beginning to the day."

The thought of being dispossessed acted

promptly upon Oliverotto. He immediately ordered his regiment to hasten to the street in which it had been billeted, and there await further commands. Then wheeling about, he put spurs to his horse, and leaving Don Michele to follow as he pleased, rode off towards the gate by which the cavalcade must enter, and not far beyond which he met Borgia surrounded as we left him.

Michelotto following after, stopped to chat with the captain of the Orsini escort, who had halted his command. Immediately behind rode Cesare's horsemen, and Michelotto, as soon as they had passed, desired the officer of the Orisini troop to send his men to their quarters, adding—

"It is the duke's wish that no soldiery follow to the Potestà."

In this Michele was mistaken, for as Borgia and the barons approached the gray stone house with overhanging moss-green roof of tiles which had served as palace to the Counts of Sinigallia, the escort of Valentino's troopers rode at their heels. At the door the officers dismounted and entered together. Pagolo led the way, with Cesare beside him. They passed into a spacious room on the ground floor, and here Borgia suddenly faced about.

There was the sound of many footsteps in the hall, the guards thronged in, the outer door was violently closed and fastened.

"What means this?" cried the elder Orsini in amaze, and trembling as his ghastly fate revealed itself.

None answered but Vitellozzo, who, in a voice hushed almost to a whisper, said:

"Pagolo, farewell!"

A crimson flush of anger overspread Borgia's face as he drew his rapier and passionately stamped his foot.

Gravina was the first to recover from the stupor of dismay. His long sword in his right hand and in his left a basket-handled main gauche, he faced the bravos who crowded upon him. Pagolo, frenzied with despair and remorse, sprang to his rescue. Oliverotto closed with the foremost of two fellows, then deftly slipping his right hand to his belt, drew thence a stiletto, which he plunged to the hilt in his opponent's neck between the casque and corselet.

The room resounded with the clash of weapons, the heavy trampling of feet, the imprecations of the combatants.

It was a struggle which numerical disproportion rendered brief.

Pagolo was brought wounded to the floor. Gravina's guard was beaten down by the strokes of half a dozen blades, and he was disarmed and bound. Oliverotto received a crushing blow from a mace full on his iron helmet before he was well

clear of his first assailant. He struggled on with the furious strength of despair; it was the work of several minutes to overpower him, to slip round his throat a silken cord, draw it tighter till the convulsive gasps ceased, till the eyes started from the purple face, till the nostrils became fixed in their dilatation for the breath that came not—till the lord of Fermo was dead.

And Vitellozzo alone stood looking on motionless, horror-struck, and unresisting. His eyes passed from Borgia's vindictive, relentless face to the struggles before him. His lips moved, but no sound came; the veins of his brow were distended; his brain reeled; the blood throbbed and surged between his temples till the forms and objects before him became blurred.

And now flashed upon his mind one of those momentary and mysterious transitions of thought which in rare instances attend the presence of death.

The gruesome scene before him vanished, and in its place stretched the familiar landscape of his Tuscan home—shining now with a splendor rarer than the beauty of Earth. It was a mirage of the mind, a marvellous phantasm of the imagination. All else but it faded, all thought of danger passed, till, while his last thoughts were thus tenderly centred far away, the sword-stroke of one who stood near laid him lifeless.

The Orsini were spared until news came from Rome, two weeks later, of the seizure of their uncle the cardinal.

Then they were strangled in the upper chamber which had been their prison.

Simultaneously with the capture of the barons, their troops were set upon in their quarters by Borgia's soldiery, and being unprepared, were, after some resistance, made prisoners and plundered—all but Oliverotto's regiment, which made off in a body to Urbino, and there dispersed.

Thus culminated the crisis of Borgia's affairs in Romagna.

A single stroke restored to him its entire possession, destroyed the conspiracy which had held him in its power, and brushed away the army of his revolted lieutenants.

It was the absolute triumph of patient and profound malignity, and to it in after years Machiavelli pointed with the finished judgment of a connoisseur as having been the crowning masterpiece of the statecraft of his time.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BELVEDERE VILLA.

AT sunrise on the 10th of August, 1503, Elvira d'Este leaned from the window of a Palazzetto in Rome.

The air was touched with the fragrance of hay-fields reclaimed here and there upon the Campania, and in passing along the street below a fruit-vender's cart scented it with a breath of luscious sweetness.

A mist on Monte Cavo gave promise of sultry heat. A contadino, followed by the shaggy dogs bred on Italian pasture lands, drove in his flock of bleating goats. The city lay yet in the drowse of the morning. Few blinds were lifted; not an artisan stirred; the quiet was ruffled only by subdued and distant sounds.

The circle of walls which, as the last vestige of the defence of the ancient world, speaks from its crumbling fragments so eloquently, stood then a sun-browned line of towers and curtains, whence at long distances a sentinel looked upon the stretch of vacant green.

Elvira, wrapped in a cashmere robe, leaned in reverie at her casement. Her type is repeated in the modern beauty of Italian girls; deep, wistful eyes; brow half covered with careless hair; nose slightly aquiline; face less full than fine; a glow of rose beneath the brunette complexion, and with ever and anon a furtive, sidelong glance.

So preoccupied was she that the sound of persons ascending the stair that led to her apartment was unnoticed. She looked and listened as an officer returning from a summer night's revel strode by singing as he went a song which the soldiers of Charles the Eighth had brought across the Alps. She caught this fragment ere the singer's voice was lost—

L'odeur navrante dez fleurs
Fust le dueil de nostre amour,
La nuict que, parmy ses pleurs,
Elle me dict—adieu pour tousjours.

C'est audessous dez fleurs qu'elle dort;
Souvent je traverse le lieu:
Je plains son trespas et son sort,
Et je dys—pour tousjours adieu.

And so Elvira heard not the steps that drew nearer—the light foot-fall of a woman, the guarded tread of a man. The moment for this visit had been chosen with exactness as that following the withdrawal of the half dozen soldiers who every night guarded the closed entrance. These had

marched away; the *custode* had previously been bribed to inattention; of all the servants, not one stirred or noticed.

Once the woman had paused, assailed by such an instant of hesitation as may shake a fixed purpose even in the gentler sex, but the long-nurtured resolve triumphed, and she hastened forward with a murmur which repetition had rendered familiar—

"I told him if ever he loved another, I would kill her."

Her companion observed this hesitation with impatient disdain. He was a workman simple in his methods, strong, determined, unflinching—he had been well paid for the task in hand, and he looked upon vacillation as beneath the human intelligence. At a sign from his companion, he produced an implement wherewith he softly opened the clumsy fastening of Elvira's door, and they entered her room together;—then he closed and bolted it behind them: and at this instant a little bird that hung in the window where Elvira stood, turned the seed vessel of its wicker cage, and flew away into the freedom of the sunshine and the flowers.

In the quiet of an August morning the day wore on with rare movement in the hot streets; for of traffic or manufacture there was little in mediæval Rome. The mid-day meal of the populace,

the *pranzo* of stewed meat and maccaroni was followed by a siesta, or by *dolce far niente* for those to whom sleep refused to come.

Since the overthrow of the barons, Cesare had beheld around him a cloudless horizon.

His dukedom assured; his enemies dead or scattered; confident of a preponderating voice in the selection of the next successor to St. Peter, with youth, health, wealth, and a valiant army—what could the future refuse?

Since his return from Romagna some weeks previously the problem around which all other interests had turned, was the old question of a choice between France and Spain—Louis at Milan, or de Cordova at Naples.

The Pontiff had not been apprised by his son of the hostage his dire straits had compelled him to yield to Machiavelli; and since it had not been possible to employ the corps of Langres, Cesare had with careless effrontery disowned his now useless compact with Louis, and had turned towards an alliance with Madrid, wherein his father, by blood and sympathy a Spaniard, had not been loath to follow. It was the preliminary correspondence with de Cordova which led to an interesting discovery.

On the arrival of the last courier from Caserta, Cesare had said:

"Whoever has been prying into the secret box

has free entrance to the Vatican, and must have knowledge when important letters arrive. The visits ceased upon discovery of the guard: for months that guard has been discontinued; the spy is presumably aware that unusual matters are being treated with the Viceroy; he knows of the arrival of a messenger;—surely if the room is left vacant and unwatched he will come."

So father and son went for a saunter in the garden alleys, followed by their retinue of prelates and pages, while ensconced in the niche of an unused door and behind a Leyden tapestry they left Giulia Farnèse.

"Suppose the unknown visitor discovers you?" Cesare had inquired with a laugh.

"I fear him not," answered the young woman; "whoever comes on such adventure will be too much pressed to play at hide and seek."

The Pope, anxious for the safety of his mistress, unfastened the lock which closed the door behind her.

"The moment you have seen him enter," he explained, "your task is done; open softly this door and escape to your room."

The Pope and his son conversed in the hearing of their reverent following during the long hour of their promenade; chiefly they spoke of the vast Basilica whose walls had risen above the foundations, and in view of which they passed. The

Pontiff declared his purpose of using for its completion materials to be taken from the Coliseum, and the duke urged him to this course as filling the additional purpose of demolishing what had served in by-gone days as the fortress of the Frangipani, and might again be converted into a formidable stronghold by the enemies of the Church. But their discourse was languid, and often the eyes of both rested upon the windows of Giulia's apartment, upon the sill of one of which was at length displayed a vase of flowers—the concerted signal—

It is done!

Basilica, Coliseum, Frangipani and attendant retinue were all dismissed at a breath, and the Borgias hastily returned to the room in which the Farnèse awaited them, her face aglow with excitement.

Her story was concisely told. After an interval which had seemed interminable, the door opened and some one entered from the hall. She looked and beheld Cardinal Corneto. He walked to the secret locker, opened it with a key he held ready, shuffled the papers with trembling hands, failed to find what he was in search of, dropped them with an imprecation, reclosed the compartment, and withdrew.

The cardinal's fate was not long undetermined. A messenger from the Pontiff brought to him at his adjacent palace the gift of a rarely illuminated mis-

sal—the *Horæ Beata Vergine*—and a kindly invitation to supper in the Belvedere Villa at the setting of the sun.

A guilty conscience awakened his alarm. There was nothing extraordinary in the summons; he had often broken bread with his spiritual master in the latter's favorite summer-house; but now, in the act of promising attendance, his voice changed, and as the messenger made his ceremonious exit, the cardinal sank unnerved in his chair.

He remained but a moment thus overcome. Hastening through an obscure vicolo to a remote part of the Vatican, he entered unannounced the chamber of Resequenz, major-domo to the Duke of Romagna, where he beheld that individual seated at a table, and plunged in abstraction.

"Resequenz!" exclaimed the cardinal in an agony of apprehension, eagerly scrutinizing the face of the man before him, as the latter with sudden start rose to his feet and made formal obeisance, "a fearful dread has come upon me—I behold a spectre from which you alone, perhaps, can save me."

The official thus addressed had been taken off his guard, and failed to show that instantaneous self-possession which alone would have deceived the searching gaze of his panic-stricken interlocutor. Something unconsciously sinister in his face confirmed the cardinal's alarms.

Throwing himself on his knees in a frenzy of terror, he clasped the hands of the silent steward:

"It is true, then!" he cried; "play not upon words, but answer!"

"Would not your fate then be mine?" asked the other, simply.

The cardinal rose to his feet. He trembled violently, but the transformation of a nervous fear to the certainty of a danger from which he saw but one escape, gave him presence of mind.

"You will not lay such inhuman cruelty upon your soul," he pleaded. "Would you have to answer for a crime against one of the heads of the Church? Resequenz," piteously cried the cardinal, "if you hope for mercy hereafter, take what you will of my wealth and grant me life. To-morrow I will fly; and far from the vengeance of my enemies, and remote from this centre of infamy, I will end my days in seclusion, at peace with Heaven and unmolested by the world."

"Why not escape at once? Why are you not already on the road?"

"Heartless man! would you have me go empty handed? The sun is near the meridian; betwixt now and the hour of this accursed supper I will make ready, and at midnight start for Viterbo with my goods and a retinue of men sufficient to protect me by the way, and pressing forward without stop-

ping to draw breath, I can be in safety at Perugia ere pursuit can overtake."

"Gold! Gold!" ejaculated the other with a sardonic laugh; "its chains link you even to the chance of death in preference to life without it."

"But, dear Resequenz," interposed Corneto, "there need be no chance of death."

"And what would you pay me for the risk to myself?"

"Fifty thousand sequins."

The major-domo's face illumined.

"It must be here before the supper," he said.

"Fear not. It would need a bolder man than I to trifle with you now."

"You must feign to be poisoned—cramp, vertigo, quivering chill—cause yourself to be assisted from the room, and after that it will not be my fault if antidotes cure you, and you escape from Rome. But at Perugia you must pretend a lingering illness."

"Of course; the after-effect of the drug."

"Here," said the major-domo, "I put into your hand this blue vial which the duke gave me an hour ago. Both at the beginning and at the end of the repast there will be sweet comfits, sugar-coated nuts, and the like; my orders are to prepare the second course, which I shall serve myself; you will notice that the Pope and Valentino and

the Farnèse eat not a morsel from that dish, however much they take upon their plates. Do you eat plentifully of it, and let the effect be manifested within a quarter of an hour."

The cardinal nodded, pressed his benefactor's hand in silence, and taking with him the poison vial, turned to go.

"Be not seen going hence," whispered Resequenz after him, "or a rope in the court of St. Angelo would be presently waiting for us both."

Corneto turned with a sudden thought:

"Suppose that the Borgias examine the comfits and discover why the dose failed?"

"The instant you are out of the room," answered the other, "every atom remaining in the dish will be destroyed."

At the Belvedere Villa, as the sun passed below the line of the Ostian hills, Cardinal Corneto was in waiting, and presently Pope Alexander, accompanied by his son and followed by Pulcio and Resequenz, and the usual escort of pages, were seen leisurely walking through the garden behind the Vatican. All were in serene good spirits, and no one scanning Corneto's placid face would have suspected the tempest of the morning.

They seated themselves, Cesare and the cardinal at the right and left of the Pope, the places at first set for Giulia Farnèse and for Michelotto having

been removed on account of the "indisposition" of those personages.

The major-domo withdrew to superintend the serving of the repast, and Pulcio addressed himself to a brace of chained falcons perched in shady nooks upon a veranda where was also suspended the frame of staples upon which the birds taken in the chase were hung.

"I have a letter to-day from the Viceroy," said the Pope to the cardinal; "you shall read it to-morrow; his letters always put one in good humor; so calm, so practical, so decided, and so amiable withal."

"The Viceroy is a man of the world," answered Corneto, slightly troubled by an allusion to dispatches from Naples.

"Wait till he grows a few years older," remarked Cesare, "and he may not be so smooth-spoken. Time plants a crotchet beneath every white hair."

"Master," inquired the dwarf turning from the birds, "do white hairs, think you, represent the sorrows or the indulgences of life?"

"When mine begin to come, Pulcio," answered the duke, "I shall rather please myself by thinking that each stands for a pleasure, than that all of them have sprung from a grief."

Resequenz entered at this moment, accompanied by servants who offered a prelude of sweets.

These were followed by the *pièce de resistance* of

the meal, a boar's head, with slices cut from the hams prepared in the manner of the modern agro dolce.

"I pray you eat heartily," said the Pope, "if but to keep me company. It is said that large eaters are not graceful men; but surely a small eater never was a good companion."

Agro dolce gave place to a peacock with tail magnificently spread, which was the supreme effort of the Italian cuisine.

"A beautiful dish," remarked the cardinal, declining to be helped from it, "but a tough bird."

"So say I," assented Alexander, "but my cooks would die of chagrin if I forbade their serving it occasionally."

The silver chalices they drank from were replenished with white wine of Montefiascone, or with red from the slopes of Vesuvius.

"I notice we have a flask of Cyprus," said Cesare, emptying his cup.

"I know nothing of it," answered Alexander; "it was brought doubtless as a matter of course."

"It stands in the ante-camera," rejoined his son, "but be it of your store or of mine, let us keep it for the last."

Upon hearing this colloquy, the dwarf left the room and returned a moment later.

"I have laid the Chypre in snow," he explained.

"Your Holiness will have been pleased," re-

marked Corneto, addressing the Pope, "to hear of the discovery at Hadrian's Tiburtine villa."

"What is the discovery?" inquired Cesare.

"A mosaic the size of this table, representing a basket of flowers, and of marvellous workmanship."

"Those ancients were wonderful men; they made their roses and their loves immortal; only their songs cannot reach to us. 'Tis pity, for how melodious must the Greek and how inspiriting must the Roman music have been."

"Simple and monotonous, though," objected Alexander; "cymbals, trumpets with three notes, the lyre with half a dozen, and pipes in abundance —a wretched concert we should call that now."

The peacock was removed after sustaining but moderate damage, and its place was filled by a heap of sugar egg-shells, each of which contained a quail stuffed with herbs.

There were no game laws in the sixteenth century, and quails were eaten in August as in December. This proved a welcome dish, and paid the penalty of the peacock's toughness.

"Is there news from the French in the Abruzzi?" inquired the cardinal, moistening his fingers in a silver basin.

"Only a budget of descriptions by eye-witnesses of Ives d'Allégre's defeat; the Spaniards set upon him in a difficult place, and drove half his army into the Garigliano."

"Strange that France and Spain are not yet at war."

"Nay, wherefore! it was impossible for the vanguards thrust thus far forward to remain month after month in face of each other without collision. The Spaniards, like good soldiers, caught their opportunity on the wing; but peace between the two countries might even yet be preserved."

"D'Allégre has an irritable disposition," observed Cesare; "this reverse has occurred through impatience that made him accept battle at a disadvantage. To lose one's temper is the folly of our nature. In Romagna d'Allégre was always quarrelling; being alone in command in the Abruzzi, with no one to dispute with, he accepts the challenge of his adversary with the petulance of a child.

"I recall an instance of fortitude that suggested the possession in an individual of that self-mastery which no provocation can shake.

"At the siege of Capua, the French were cannonading, and only when the place was taken did we know what havoc had been wrought. Each day a company of musicians, concealed from view, played to the defenders, sweet, soft, thrilling strains, of which we, far away and standing amid the discharge of our cannon, could sometimes catch a faint refrain.

"It seemed the very type of calmness in the face of death."

The fateful moment had come, and the second course of sweets was placed before the feasters, by whom it was observed with different sentiments. Corneto bore himself with heroic self-possession. Rising, he took the dish from the hand of Resequenz, who was about to offer it to the Pope, and with profound reverence presented it himself, by that act implying that although permitted to sit at the same table, he was but the menial of the head of the Church.

Alexander took several pieces upon his plate; the cardinal resumed his place, the major-domo handed him the dish from which he helped himself, and passed it to Cesare, who declined it, saying:

"Sweets once at a meal is enough for my taste."

The wine of Cyprus appeared at this moment fresh from its cold bath, and with a few flakes of the snow of the Apennines in the spaces of the straw wrapper that enfolded the glass. The goblets were filled while the Pope nibbled a crust of bread, leaving his sugar plums untasted.

Both he and his son observed that the cardinal eat without stint of those on his plate.

Resequenz also watched him with interest, for the part of a poisoned man was now to be acted before the eyes of connoisseurs.

The cardinal went on with his candies with increasing relish.

"To return to Ives d'Allégre," he said, addressing Valentino with the satisfied good humor of one who has eaten and drunk well, "I have often thought, and the mention of military affairs recalls the subject, that even if your superb stroke at Sinigallia had not been made, you with your army would none the less have crushed the Orsini."

"It might have been so," replied the duke reflectively; "nothing is stronger than desire backed by despair."

"But it was surer and safer in the method adopted," pursued the cardinal, glad to talk upon a subject which could not be agreeable to the remembrance of either of his companions.

"Sinigallia has made me many enemies," said Cesare, answering the cardinal; "success is the one unpardonable sin."

"Success!" exclaimed Corneto, emptying his silver cup. "What a pregnant word is that. No man can look without emotion down the vista of life to the brilliant days when all was new, and the future seemed a galaxy of stars. But how glad must be the retrospect when the harvest is ours, and all the things we coveted are garnered."

"Is the Chypre cold enough?" inquired the dwarf as the three goblets were set down empty.

"Ay, it keeps its subtle flavor, which too much snow would spoil."

The servants had withdrawn from the room, and only Resequenz remained standing in respectful attention and with his eyes fixed upon the cardinal. It was time, he thought, for the effect of the sweets.

"I once heard you say," remarked Corneto to Cesare, "that there are seven ways to strike an enemy; through life, health, freedom, reputation, wife, children, property."

"I but quoted Galeazzo Visconti," answered the duke.

"And have you never thought, since Sinigallia, that the greatest of all faults is to suffer the heirs of the dead to escape? Think you the children of Vitellozzo, and the son of Pagolo Orsini will not rise to confront you with arms, or to strike you unawares hereafter?"

The answer was upon Valentino's lips, when Resequenz perceived at length the first indication of the comedy to be enacted.

Alexander and Cesare also observed it, and fixed their eyes in silence upon the cardinal, whose face, till now flushed with the good cheer, had changed color. His jaw dropped, his breath became labored, the eyes stared vacantly, a shudder convulsed his frame.

"Done to perfection," murmured Resequenz to himself; "he must have seen a poisoned man die."

"What is it?" cried Cesare in pretended amaze.

"Give him air and water," he said as the major-domo sprang to the cardinal's assistance. But the latter shook him off with a gasp of anguish. "Poisoned! Poisoned!" he shrieked with a wail that rung down the silent gardens of the Belvedere. "Your promise was false—you have killed me!"

Resequenz started with a sudden thrill of dismay.

"Yet no," continued Corneto in a stifled voice—"I wrong you . . . it is that hateful dwarf . . . he got the vial from me . . . he has poured it in the wine . . . oh! . . . it is the wine that burns like fire!"

Valentino sprang to his feet, and glanced hastily about him, but the jester had vanished. His eyes fell on the face of his father—there too he beheld the change of color, the vacant stare, the head dropped backward, a foam gathering upon the lips.

Summoned by the cries of the cardinal, the servants rushed into the room.

"Quick," said Valentino, to the foremost of them, "take me to the palace . . . to my room . . . one of you bring the drops that . . ."

His utterance failed, his body became rigid beneath the first spasm of the fiery poison, he would have fallen, had not strong arms borne him from the room.

By Resequenz's direction the Pontiff and the cardinal were similarly removed, each to his chamber.

Cesare was laid upon his bed, and a leech was sent for. On hearing this order, he murmured, "No . . . Ormès."

One of the servants hastened away in quest of the magician; a second ran to find some philter of his own, the third stood awestruck. The duke's power of speech had nearly failed, and his face was distorted with the spasm of an approaching convulsion, but with the supreme effort of one whose life depends upon utterance, he said in accents barely audible:

"The ivory cabinet in the next room—break it —in a secret drawer is an antidote . . ."

The servant hurried from the room, and a moment later was heard the crash of the cabinet being wrenched to pieces.

The duke's eyes became fixed upon a presence that had crept swiftly to his side. It was Pulcio, his worn old face suddenly tenfold wrinkled, and with mouth askew and quivering. "It was I did it," he hissed in Valentino's ear; "I met Corneto with the blue bottle in his hand; I knew what it was, I had seen one like it before. I swore if he did not give it me I would denounce him as plotting to poison you—ha! ha!" laughed the dwarf —the poor fool's last jest! "And now my heart is content, for *she* is avenged."

"She," faintly echoed Valentino, "of whom speak you?"

"Of Nerina—my little daughter whom you took from me three years ago. She died dishonored—but *that* crime, at least, you expiate!"

The steps of the returning servant were heard, but ere he passed the threshold the fool had gone.

Valentino was past speech and barely conscious. The servant poured a little of the essence into his mouth. A moment after arrived Ormès, breathless; he snatched the vial from the domestic, glanced at it, and raising the sufferer's head, poured all that remained down his throat.

The effect of this remedy became presently apparent; the rigid muscles relaxed, the convulsion which was commencing ceased, the breathing showed that the heart was recovering its action.

Don Michele entered the room aghast at the result of the attempt upon the cardinal. Soon after came del Nero; for the news had flashed over the city that the Pope was dead, and the Duke of Romagna dying.

"Will he live?" asked the condottiere.

"Yes," answered Ormès; "begone all of you, and by midnight I shall have brought him back to consciousness."

The condottiere motioned Don Michele to follow as he withdrew. They passed into a neighboring room, and del Nero said:

"I have here that which was delivered to me from the lady Ginevra Savelli, with the message

that it should be given the duke without an hour's delay."

"Nothing can be given him for a day or two at the earliest," answered Michelotto.

"He was ever impatient to get whatever she sent him."

"He will not be impatient now."

"Shall I leave it here till to-morrow?"

"What is it that you have?"

"This basket."

"A basket of fruit! nay, he wants no fruit now, no matter by whom sent."

"Who said it was fruit? I know not its contents."

Michelotto lifted a corner of the lid.

"Strange," he said, "it seems filled with linen."

"Look! what is that?" exclaimed the bravo, peeping over his shoulder—"it is stained with blood."

A cloth was lifted, and there, the head severed from the body, lay the white, agonized face of the erring and ill-fated girl.

A cry of horror escaped the lips of both the hardened men who looked upon it.

"Elvira! *Povera ragazza!*" ejaculated Michelotto, "Ginevra's jealousy has killed her. Go get this quickly out of sight, Cesare shall never see it;" and he pushed del Nero from the room with his ghastly burden in his arms.

The condottiere made his way through the streets which thronged with the populace, flocking this way and that, bearing torches, questioning one another, and adding to the general alarm by the fearful rumors which sprang into circulation. At the bridge of St. Angelo the guards had been doubled; hurrying from their barrack came a column of infantry to seize the approaches to the Vatican.

The posts at the city gates were ordered to be on the alert; it was vaguely feared that some calamity was about to smite the city, and that the Pope and his son had been but the first victims of an unknown enemy.

But none spoke a word of commiseration.

Some shouted for Colonna, and some called that the Orsini were at hand: but all, between the exclamations of apprehension and the faction cries with which they made the air resound, cursed the fallen Borgias. It almost reached the sick man's room—that startling cry of rage and vengeance long restrained—

"To the Tiber with Duca Valentino!"

CONCLUSION.

ALEXANDER expired eight days after the supper at the Belvedere Villa. Cardinal Corneto, who recovered and lived for several years, bears competent witness to the power of the poison to which his host succumbed.

"Soon after swallowing the wine," he wrote to Paolo Jove, "I felt a burning flame within me."

Contemporaneous writers add particulars which their age accepted—that the devil appeared and gazed impatiently on the sick Pontiff, and that a black dog, which took neither meat nor drink, could not be driven from the room.

The chamber in which the Pope breathed his last may still be seen by the favored few to whom the Appartamento Borgia is opened. Upon its wall hangs Alexander's portrait as one of the Magi, kneeling before a Virgin personified by Giulia Farnèse.

Few relics survive of the Borgias.

Of all the likenesses painted of this family, but one remains of the Pope, three of Valentino, and only a medal of Lucretia. One of the state swords

of Valentino, which was borne before him in procession at Naples—a magnificent blade inlaid with gold—is in possession of the descendant of his old enemies the Caetani.

At the Church of St. Paul, where are the more or less ideal portraits of all the Bishops of Rome, a blank space till recently appeared, where should have been the features of Alexander; the Holy See would fain have forgotten him, and have brought others to do the same.

The visitor to St. Peter's sees to-day the sculptured portrait of Giulia Farnèse above the sarcophagus of her brother Paul III. She reclines in graceful—not to say voluptuous—ease, gazing down the distance of the Basilica. Her nudity shocked Innocent X., and he caused a leaden drapery, painted white, to be applied to her marble limbs. However vague many parts of her life, its ignoble fact is not to be veiled; she remains to history a figure of beauty, famous as the mistress of Pope Borgia, whose love she retained to the last.

At Ferrara in 1506 Don Ferrante fomented a conspiracy to assassinate his brother Alfonzo. The plot was discovered, and its author seized. Don Ferrante threw himself at his brother's feet. The latter, in his rage, struck the culprit heavily in the face with a stick, destroying the sight of one eye.

At the intercession of Lucretia, sentence of death was changed at the scaffold to perpetual imprisonment in a tower adjoining the palace.

So the brothers lived thirty-four years, the one in a prison cell, with but the drifting clouds in view by day, and the solemn stars at night, the other ruling in joyous magnificence till death, removing him, liberated Don Ferrante at the age of sixty-three, gray, bent, so long unconscious of the world as to have grown indifferent to it.

For seventeen years Lucretia lived at Ferrara, ever more and more beloved and honored—a dutiful wife, an exemplary mother, bearing so great a tribute to the bonds of blood that she lamented the death of Valentino.

The judgment of impartial contemporaries presents her as amiable, well meaning, frivolous, and unfortunate in the influences of her early life. Her faults resulted from vicissitudes for which she was only partly answerable. She sought to efface by the rectitude of her after years the stigma which, deservedly or not, had been fastened upon the repute of her youth.

During the night of the 24th of June, 1519, surrounded by her husband and her children, she passed away.

Her body was laid in the vaults of the Convent of Corpus Christi. The place of her interment was included in demolitions hastily made for mili-

tary purposes a century ago, and now even its original situation is uncertain.

Thus is curiously fulfilled the prediction of the magician Ormès—"*an unknown grave.*"

Her vengeance accomplished, Ginevra fled to a villa of the Colonna family near the modern town of Fondi.

But no suspicion fastened upon her. Elvira's death was attributed to Borgia, and when the outcry from Ferrara subsided, she was remembered only as one of his victims.

Filled with the fame of the Countess Savelli's beauty, Heyradin Pasha landed one night with a hundred Barbary Moors and attempted to carry her off.

Roused by the noise, she sprang from her bedroom window and escaped to the hills. A dangerous fever followed this exposure, and she died a week later at the Convent of Santa Maddalena, where she had taken refuge.

She passed away in convulsive delirium, and the sister who watched beside her listened amazed to ravings of the white face of a dead woman.

Once more did Valentino see Machiavelli: of that interview the Florentine relates that Borgia, lying paralyzed in his darkened room, told that he had anticipated the contingencies that might arise

at his father's death, and had made provision for them all, but that he had not foreseen himself crippled and helpless at that juncture.

Deprived of his guiding hand, and left adrift amid stormy times, his fortunes foundered while he still lay beneath the shadow of death.

The treasure which he committed to Candale to be delivered to Lucretia for safe keeping, was seized by the Florentines.

The Orsini raised a host against him in Romagna, and conquered his dukedom by a few swift strokes.

The Colonna faction, too long alienated, listened to appeals and promises and threats with equal indifference.

Julius della Rovere, who cherished an implacable hatred of the Borgias, succeeded to the Pontificate in November; the French King sustained reverses, the Spaniards remembered Valentino's alliance with their enemy—neither friend nor resource remained.

Oblivious to the fact that others could be faithless as himself, he ventured on board ship at Cività Vecchia under safe conduct, was seized by order of the Pope, and delivered to Gonsalvo de Cordova, who sent him to the Castle of Seville.

Here he remained a prisoner for two years, suffering occasionally acute relapses from the poison that yet lingered in his blood.

In October, 1506, he escaped and took refuge with the King of Navarre, at that moment in conflict with Don Loys de Beamonte, Constable of Lerina; while awaiting better days, Cesare took service under him and received command of the corps put in the field against this revolted vassal.

On the 12th day of March, 1507, Cesare, at the head of some light horse, pursued a sortie back toward the castle limits and ran full into an ambuscade.

His soldiers fled at the sight.

Unhorsed, he fought valiantly on foot, until overwhelmed by numbers and pierced with wounds.

His body was stripped of armor and ornaments, and being found on the ensuing morning by a party of searchers, it was thrown across a mule, borne to the Cathedral of Pampeluna, and there buried.

So perished Valentino at the age of thirty-one, leaving only the brief chapter of his dramatic and sanguinary career.

Across four centuries of intermediate history we look back to the suffering and desolation of mediæval days in Italy.

We marvel at the ghastly visions which remain of that sombre period: it is difficult to us to comprehend such men and such times.

The long anguish is ended. No more the tramp

of foreign soldiery: no longer the strife of city with city. The light of a beautiful day has dawned. The fairest hope of Dante has been surpassed, and he, the poet-patriot, is honored and loved by a united nation of his countrymen whose capital is —ROME.

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